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April 1989

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The New Criterion *April 1989*

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Bradley W. Bloch's essay, "Between Art and a Hard Place," appeared in our February issue.

Frederick Brown is the author of *Theater and Revolution* (1980), which will be re-issued by Vintage in May.

Joseph Frank's essay in this issue is adapted from the preface to a new edition of Erich Kahler's *The Tower and the Abyss,* to be published by Transaction Books.

Eric Gibson wrote on Medardo Rosso for the February issue of *The New Criterion.*

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Jed Perl's book, *Paris Without End,* has been published by North Point Press.

Wyatt Prunty's study of contemporary poetry will be published later this year by Oxford.

Eva Resnikova writes regularly on dance for *The New York Observer* and *The New Criterion.*

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Lauren Weiner reviewed Juan Goytisolo's *Forbidden Territory* for our December issue.

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Modern art at the National Gallery

by Hilton Kramer

More than a decade has passed since the opening of the East Building at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, and to celebrate this event the museum has mounted an exhibition called "Twentieth-Century Art: Selections for the Tenth Anniversary of the East Building." From the outset it was to be the purpose of this vast new edifice to perform two principal functions for the museum: to serve as its exhibition space for the showing of twentieth-century art, and to provide a large, flexible area in which to present temporary loan exhibitions of the art of all periods. On the present anniversary occasion, these two functions have been combined for an exhibition that brings together both the museum's own collection of twentieth-century art and loans from private collections and from artists and their families. (The loans, we may presume, consist of objects the National Gallery would very much like to obtain for its permanent collection, preferably by donation.) Most of the principal exhibition space in the East Building is devoted to this survey, which will remain on view until the end of 1990—a remarkably long tenure for a show which, though large in size, is little more than a patchwork miscellany in content.

Both the scale of the exhibition, which includes more than two hundred works, and its two-year schedule can surely be taken to indicate that this event represents a concentrated effort on the part of the National Gallery to establish its East Building as one of our major repositories of the art of the modern era, and thus as a logical extension of the Old Master collection housed in the museum's more traditional West Building. It represents, in other words, the same sort of effort that we have lately observed in the ill-conceived Lila Acheson Wallace Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[1] It must be said that in neither case have we yet been given any reason to believe that these efforts will succeed in building collections or creating programs that are worthy of the institutions in question. But then, neither of these institutions was originally intended to serve as a museum of modern art.

At the National Gallery, there was an express ban on the acquisition of works of art by living artists until 1965, when the policy was changed to accommodate the bequest of the Chester Dale collection, and at the Met there was for so many years so little inclination to take an interest in modern art that no official ban was necessary. But as the public for modern art has grown and as the art of the modern era, including all sorts of new art, some of which even passes for being "postmodern," has become an established part of contemporary cultural life—art that is taught in the schools, praised in the media, and eagerly sought out in the marketplace—this categorical rejection by

1 See "The Met's 20th-Century Folly" in *The New Criterion* for March 1987.

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our major "encyclopedic" museums was no longer deemed to be viable. Unfortunately for these museums, however, the history of their past relation to modern art, which was entirely negative, could not be repealed without an immense and costly effort, and the question that continues to haunt this effort is whether, in attempting to effect this repeal, museums like the National Gallery and the Met are serving the best interest of the public and of our cultural life. Or, to put the question another way, does this tardy entry into the field of modern art serve the interest of the museums more than it serves the interest of the public? Or, to put the matter still another way, is this new concentration on modern art primarily an attempt to cash in on a new popular interest or do the museums in question really have something serious and substantial to offer their public?

In attempting to answer such questions, it must be noted first of all that both museums have been obliged to avail themselves of large quantities of art that is either of marginal interest or of dubious quality—the kind of art that currently bloats the international art market—simply in order to fill their newly created space and keep their programs in motion. It is always a bad augury, of course, when we find that upon embarking on an ambitious new program, the first thing to be sacrificed by a museum is its standard of aesthetic quality. In this important matter, the Met has been much more at fault than the National Gallery, but the reason for this may be a purely logistical one: the Met has far more "permanent" space to fill in the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing than the National Gallery has in the East Building. I cannot see that there is any fundamental difference in the curatorial outlook of these two museums as far as their venture into the modern field is concerned. Neither is governed by any clearly articulated aesthetic vision, and both are abjectly hostage to the fickle winds of fashion. In neither, moreover, is the public given anything that even approaches a coherent or systematic account of the modern movement in art. Such an account is clearly beyond them—and not only because they haven't got the objects that would make it possible but because they have never marshaled the kind of thought that is a prerequisite to its implementation. In the absence of thoughtful reflection, both have been obliged to resort to a kind of smorgasbord method in their collecting and exhibition activities—a method better suited to satisfying a curiosity about current reputations than to serving the public's understanding of what the achievements of modernism really are.

The current "Selections" show is, as its name implies, very much an exhibition of the smorgasbord type. Organized, for the most part, around two pivotal developments in the history of modern art—the School of Paris and the New York School—the exhibition fails to give to either the kind of sustained and thoughtful attention that is called for in a show of this size. The account of the School of Paris is greatly distorted by, among other things, the space accorded to Amedeo Modigliani—an appealing painter, to be sure, but a minor one whose art was not really central to this development. And the account of the New York School is virtually capsized by the dominant position accorded to Barnett Newman, whose cycle of paintings called *The Stations of the Cross*, one of the most pretentious flops in the entire history of abstract painting, is installed in a large, circular, shrinelike space that is clearly meant to invite our worship but that only succeeds in prompting our ridicule. But the Modiglianis have to be given this exaggerated weight because they are part of the Chester Dale bequest, and Newman's *Stations of the Cross* is given this unearned position mainly, I suppose, because the National Gallery is still hoping to persuade its present owners to hand over the series as a gift to the museum. It will be a mercy for the public, in my opinion, if in the end they refuse, for *The Stations of the Cross* is one of the real white elephants of modern art and the thought of its occupying some huge space at the National Gallery in

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perpetuity is at once extremely depressing and extremely comical.

There are, as you would expect, some perfectly wonderful things to see in the "Selections" exhibition: some fine Picassos, the three Brancusi sculptures, at least two of the paintings by Joan Miró—*The Farm* and *Head of a Catalan Peasant*—and the very touching portrait of *The Artist and His Mother* by Arshile Gorky. (On the other hand, the attention given to Gorky's very derivative Cubist paintings of the 1930s places a burden on those pictures they cannot sustain.) There are some fine Giacometti sculptures, too, among the other things one can admire. But *as* a survey of twentieth-century art the show is too woefully uneven—too unconscionably inflated in some areas (post-Abstract Expressionism art in New York, for example) and too sparse in others, including, most surprisingly, that of the New York School itself, which, except for Mark Rothko and David Smith, is not really represented in any depth—to amount to anything more than a scattershot anthology.

Quite the best single thing in the exhibition is the installation of David Smith sculptures in the East Building's tower gallery. It is interesting to note that these welded-metal constructions from the 1950s and early 1960s are now routinely described as "figurative sculptures," which in a sense they are, of course, in the same sense in which Picasso's very abstract *Nude Woman* of 1910 can be described as a figurative painting. Yet both belong to the history of abstract art, and in the case of the Smith constructions, which occupy a place in the later phase of that history that is far more important than Newman's *Stations*, this crucial attachment to an aesthetic of abstraction gets a little lost in the presentation. To describe them so categorically as "figurative sculptures," however, is probably a gesture toward making them more accessible to a public that tends to be somewhat shy of sculpture that *is* abstract.

It is absurd, by the way, for the museum to claim that the "tower gallery exhibition echoes . . . the sloping fields around Smith's home" in the Adirondacks—a statement that could have been written only by someone who had never been to Bolton Landing while Smith was at work there. What the tower gallery exhibition actually echoes and attempts to replicate is the installation given Smith's sculpture in the East Building at the time of its inauguration eleven years ago, and that installation, like the present one, drew its inspiration from photographs of Smith's 1962 exhibition in the Roman amphitheater at Spoleto, Italy, which the museum also acknowledges. But only an overeager copywriter would be guilty of confusing Bolton Landing with Spoleto. All the same, the Smith sculptures look wonderful.

For the most part, however, the exhibition of sculpture is a great problem in the East Building. The three major sculpture exhibitions that have been mounted in the East Building since its inauguration—the Rodin show in 1981, the Smith show in 1982, and the Nasher collection of modern sculpture in 1988—all had the effect of underscoring the unhappy fact that this big, sleek, sprawling building does not really lend itself to an effective or coherent exposition of a large number of sculptural objects. The division of space is all wrong, its scale is unfriendly to sculpture and often has the effect of diminishing its aesthetic presence, and the overbearing pseudo-sculptural attributes of the architecture compete so aggressively for the spectator's eye that every sculpture has to fight for its life to be properly seen.[2] If in the tower gallery installation Smith's sculpture manages to survive unscathed, it is because the tower space is more or less sealed off, architecturally, from the distractions that dominate the rest of the East Building.

Which brings us to the most fundamental of the problems that the National Gallery

2 The problem of exhibiting sculpture in the East Building was discussed in some detail in my article on "David Smith in Washington" in *The New Criterion* for January 1983.

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faces in attempting to establish itself as a significant museum of modern art. Even if the museum were in possession of a comprehensive collection of modern art, which it isn't, and even if it were able to muster the intellectual talent that could provide it with the kind of aesthetic vision it is now so sorely lacking, the National Gallery would still find itself saddled with a building that literally has no place in it for a permanent modern collection of any scope and depth. The virtues of the East Building, such as they are, are the virtues of a gigantic show palace designed, above all, to handle temporary blockbuster exhibitions and the crowds that are drawn to them. For a building of its size, the East Building contains remarkably little permanent exhibition space. To mount the current "Selections" exhibition, the museum has been obliged to press the bulk of both its "permanent" and its "temporary" space into service, but this large exhibition is itself a temporary show, and when it comes down at the end of 1990 and yet another blockbuster spectacular is installed in the cavernous basement galleries, modern art will once again be relegated to the kind of gallery space that allows for little more than a token representation.

What should have been obvious—but wasn't, at least to this observer—when the East Building opened in 1978 is that the dual functions which this immense structure was designed to serve are destined to remain in permanent conflict. And since we have no reason to believe that the National Gallery is likely to abandon its practice of using the East Building as the primary site for staging its huge temporary shows, then there is no reason to believe that there will ever be adequate space there for a serious collection of modern art. There would thus seem to be no possibility that the East Building will ever serve as an adequate modern extension of the Old Master collection housed in the West Building. That possibility would appear to be permanently mortgaged to the needs of the blockbuster exhibition program.

If this is indeed the case, then it has important implications for the way the National Gallery has been conducting itself in the modern field. For one thing, its energetic attempt to lure away important collections that rightly belong in the communities—Dallas, say, or Chicago—where they were formed over the course of many years ought probably to be reconsidered. It should not be the role of a National Gallery in Washington to deny to communities elsewhere in the nation the cream of their artistic resources, especially when there is so little likelihood that the museum in question will be in a position to do them permanent justice. For another, its program of temporary exhibitions in the modern field should be held to a higher standard than now generally obtains—a standard that is compatible with that which is observed in its Old Master exhibitions. That standard was triumphantly met in the marvelous Matisse exhibition of 1986, but it was miserably betrayed in the Wyeth-"Helga" exhibition of 1987 and in the overblown O'Keeffe exhibition the same year, and it is left very much in doubt by the current "Selections" exhibition. It is in events like these that we are made to glimpse the yawning intellectual void that lies at the very center of the museum's modern program. From an institution of the National Gallery's stature we have reason to expect something rather better in the way of intellectual leadership. There is throughout the art museum world today a severe crisis of standards—and not only aesthetic standards—and the National Gallery should not be content to remain what it now is: a conspicuous part of the problem rather than a beacon pointing the way to some higher-minded solutions.

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The "Collected" Philip Larkin

by Robert Richman

The *Collected Poems* of Philip Larkin brings together what may be the most important body of poetry written in the post-World War II period.[1] The size of the volume comes as something of a surprise, however. Larkin, who died in 1985 at the age of sixty-three, published four slender books in his lifetime (the longest was forty-eight pages): *The North Ship* (1945), *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974). Anthony Thwaite, the editor of the *Collected Poems* and one of the executors of Larkin's estate, has brought forth a volume containing 242 poems—172 in a first section ("Poems 1946-83") containing all of what Thwaite considers Larkin's mature work (omitting, astonishingly, *The North Ship*) and seventy poems in a second section ("Early Poems 1938-45"). This latter section contains, in addition to *The North Ship*, twenty-two previously unpublished poems; the book's first section, meanwhile, contains sixty-one poems in print for the first time. Both sections have poems from *In the Grip of Light*, a volume Larkin tried, and failed, to publish in 1947. All of the "new" poems—which have been retrieved from Larkin's notebooks and typescripts—have been arranged chronologically in the book's two sections along with the previously published material, both collected and uncollected. As it turns out, these added poems do not really enhance what one might legitimately refer to as Larkin's real oeuvre. Most of the rejected poems—and this is what they must be called, as Larkin considered them unfit to publish or collect in his lifetime—should really have been consigned to an appendix.

Not everything about Thwaite's edition is so muddled, of course. Dates of composition have been provided; these, along with the chronological arrangement of the poems, permit the reader to follow more closely the ups and downs of Larkin's career. Thus, we can see how the brilliant "At Grass," which was completed on January 3, 1950, emerged phoenix-like from a long period of uncertainty, and seemed to be the catalyst for a quick succession of marvels, all written in the following year: "Deceptions," "Coming," "If, My Darling," "Wants," "Absences," "Spring," "No Road," and a number of others. From the perspective afforded by this book, good poems often seem to be the greatest inspiration for more good poems. Any biographer of Larkin who would locate the sources of poetic inspiration primarily in external events might bear this in mind.

Thwaite's additions also confirm the prevailing view of Larkin as our late Prince of Despair. The new poems are like versions of the Larkin we all know. Though less interesting and often less technically

1 The *Collected Poems* were published jointly by Faber and the Marvell Press in London in September, 1988. The American edition, to be published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, is now said to be forthcoming in April, after several postponements.

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accomplished, they show us that the poet's description of himself from a 1979 interview—"Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth"—was no exaggeration. The previously uncollected "Heads in the Women's Ward" seems to be a dry run for "The Old Fools":

> On pillow after pillow lies
> The wild white hair and staring eyes;
> Jaws stand open; necks are stretched
> With every tendon sharply sketched;
> A bearded mouth talks silently
> To someone no one else can see.
>
> Sixty years ago they smiled
> At lover, husband, first-born child.
>
> Smiles are for youth. For old age come
> Death's terror and delirium.

Not the least interesting thing about Larkin's poetry is how many different forms his bleakness took. He wrote of solitude: "the dining-room declares/A larger loneliness" ("Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel"). Existential dread was a favorite theme: "the solving emptiness/That lies just under all we do" ("Ambulances"). Old age was an obsession: "Why aren't they screaming?" the poet asks of "The Old Fools." He also wrote about his own mortality: "Unresting death/One whole day nearer now" ("Aubade"), as well as about the death of others ("All know they are going to die./Not yet, perhaps not here, but in the end,/And somewhere like this" ("The Building"). There is the anguish of calamities (in "The Explosion," about a mining disaster); rape ("Deceptions"); and work ("Toads"). Even nature is perceived to be full of woe: "[t]heir greenness," Larkin writes about "The Trees," "is a kind of grief." His verse teems with the bitterness of false hope. In "Home is So Sad," Larkin complains how home began as "A joyous shot at how things ought to be,/Long fallen wide"; in "A Study of Reading Habits," literature is exposed as humbug. In "I Remember, I Remember," nostalgia itself is revealed to be nothing more than a nostalgic lie.

There was much that made Larkin despondent in the world of middle-class England as well: he was a magnet to the iron filings of vulgarity in contemporary life. In "Going, Going," for example, he deplores "the bleak high-risers," "[m]ore houses . . . more parking," and grimly predicts that "All that remains/For us will be concrete and tyres." In "The Whitsun Weddings," the poet's eye is drawn to the "fathers with broad belts under their suits . . . mothers loud and fat;/An uncle shouting smut." In "Here," Larkin takes note of the "cut-price crowd," and in "Arrivals, Departures," Larkin's "traveller"—unlike the one, for example, in William Blake's "Ah! Sun-flower"—carries a sample case.

It was perhaps inevitable that Larkin's ardent pursuit of despair should lead to himself. In "Dockery and Son," a poignant account of a visit to his old college, Larkin learns from the Dean that Dockery, who was at school with the poet, has a son enrolled there. Dockery was "[c]onvinced he . . . should be added to!" and this startles the bachelor poet. "Why did he think adding meant increase?/To me it was dilution." This is a confession not just of Larkin's reluctance to make the requisite sacrifices for family life—*There's not enough of me to go around*—but of his insecurity as well: *I think so little of myself, why should I create more littleness?*

"Dockery and Son" may not fully persuade us of Larkin's uncertain self-esteem; but about his distaste for modernity there can be no doubt. Even skeptics of psychology will have difficulty disputing the notion that much of Larkin's querulousness about the modern world—its people, its ways, its art—stemmed from an uneasiness about his own place in it. This characterization is not meant to deprecate Larkin as a man or artist: far from it. But it can't be denied that there was much discontent in the poet's character. His often expressed distaste for cheap suits, highways, "perms," the libidinous, ignorant younger generation, and marriage and

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children provides ample evidence. Larkin once remarked in an interview that "children are very horrible, aren't they? Selfish, noisy, cruel, vulgar little brutes"—as if this were all there was to it.

Larkin's inclination to disparagement can also be seen in "Self's the Man." This poem begins with an affirmation of the big-heartedness of a married man named "Arnold," but quickly shifts to become a revelation of the subject's essential selfishness. "But wait, not so fast," writes Larkin. "Is there such a contrast [between me and him]?"

> He was out for his own ends
> Not just pleasing his friends;
>
> And if it was such a mistake
> He still did it for his own sake,
> Playing his own game.
> So he and I are the same . . .

Some critics have attempted to disarm Larkin's bleakness by attributing it to an invented persona. A recent example is Grey Gowrie's review of Larkin's *Collected Poems* in the October 15, 1988 edition of the *Weekend Telegraph*. "Larkin himself was not the bored, uninformed, emblematically cycle-clipped representative of a provincial culture," wrote Gowrie. The "role . . . [is a] literary creation . . . . Indeed, the making of fictions and the use of fictional techniques are insufficiently considered by critics of poetry, too quick to assume poems strip bare where novels dress up."

In the case of certain poets, questioning the validity of a poem's "I" is sound critical practice. With Larkin, however, it's a mistake. Obviously, it's impossible to say precisely how disaffected Larkin was. Yet, speaking as someone who believes that poetry often traffics in fictional scenarios, I have to think that Larkin himself possessed the powerful tendency for discontentment that is expressed in his poetry. The proof is in the prose writings, interviews, and Larkin's own statement that he always tried "to avoid [a] false relation between art and life . . . . I think that one of the great criticisms of poets of the past is that they said one thing and did another . . . ."

It is important to highlight the authenticity of this disaffected self, because doing so makes Larkin's heroic attempts to overcome his hardheartedness that much more affecting. Dismissing Larkin's irascible side has another negative effect: it divests his poetry of the element that constitutes its greatest appeal. When Larkin aired his misanthropy, it struck a chord in those of us for whom the easiest response to a confusing world is to assail it. Larkin's embodiment of the pandemic impulse to speak and act out of fear and weakness, rather than from confidence and strength, is one reason why his poetry has achieved such a remarkable popularity. It is also one of the reasons why his verse is probably more fully representative of the postwar era than that of any other poet.

One of Larkin's chief aims as a poet, certainly, was to render his bleak outlook as plainly as possible. To this end, he purged many of his lines of imagery. The idea was that no aesthetic cushion (except humor, of which there is a good amount in Larkin) should ease the pain. This pictorial stinginess, and its accompanying gloomy realism, are the chief traits of the English poetic group known as the Movement, which emerged in the Fifties and of which Larkin was considered to be a leading member. In the introduction to the first Movement anthology, *New Lines* (1956), Robert Conquest, the book's editor, wrote that George Orwell was the most decisive influence on the poets in this group. These included Donald Davie, John Wain, D. J. Enright, Thom Gunn, and Elizabeth Jennings. Claiming a novelist, critic, and political commentator as a poetic inspiration cast the Movement poets in an unpoetic light from the very start. But this was their wish: to deal with ordinary experience in "new lines" of prosaic language untainted by idealism and mysticism (qualities they associated with the romantic rhetoric of

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Dylan Thomas), allusion and ambiguity (techniques they rejected in Eliot and Pound), or most forms of poetic lyricism. Blake Morrison, the Movement's historian, has written that its writers were devoted to the principles of "rationalism, realism, and empiricism." [2]

Empiricism is the key word in considering the Movement poets. The term is linked to the philosophical school of logical positivism, which in its simplest definition—from *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*—holds that "all meaningful statements are either analytic or conclusively verifiable or at least confirmable by observation and experiment and that metaphysical theories are therefore strictly meaningless." This describes, to a large degree, the philosophical position of the Movement poets.

A form of the word "empirical" turns up once in Larkin's oeuvre. In "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album," from *The Less Deceived*, the poet wrote:

> But o, photography! as no art is,
> Faithful and disappointing! that records
> Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as
> frauds,
> And will not censor blemishes
> Like washing-lines, and Hall's-Distemper
> boards,
>
> But shows the cat as disinclined, and shades
> A chin as doubled when it is, what grace
> Your candor thus confers upon her face!
> How overwhelmingly persuades
> That this is a real girl in a real place,
>
> In every sense empirically true!

"In every sense empirically true!" does characterize a good deal of Larkin's best verse. One thinks, for example, of "Aubade," a marvelous late poem in which the poet wondered, with a fervently logical and empirical completeness, "how/And where and when I shall myself die." Yet in "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album," Larkin claims that photography, not poetry, is the "[f]aithful and disappointing" art. This seems to suggest that poetry is capable of something more than the unrevised rendering of reality found in a typical photograph, or in an ordinary Movement poem.

The equivocal attitude toward the Movement aesthetic implied in "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" was not unprecedented. Earlier in his career, Larkin had written a more metaphorically lavish and openly hopeful kind of poetry than the bulk of what he produced during his Movement phase. Larkin's first book, *The North Ship*, published in 1945, when the poet was just twenty-three, showed the influence of Yeats, whom Larkin later spurned. The second of the book's thirty-two poems started off like this:

> This was your place of birth, this daytime
> palace,
> This miracle of glass, whose every hall
> The light as music fills, and on your face
> Shines petal-soft: sunbeams are prodigal
> To show you pausing at a picture's edge . . . .

To focus on a face flattered by "petal-soft" beams of light and not—as in the typical poem of Larkin's maturity—on a scene distorted by the ugly lights of a hotel corridor; to write of a palace rather than of fish docks or dirty canals; to honor one's place of birth rather than attend to scenes of death; to celebrate a miracle, rather than bemoan a disaster—this was the youthful, pre-Movement Larkin. In the poems of *The North Ship*, the poet improved the drab hues of reality instead of mirroring them, and the results were remarkably good.

A few years later, however, Larkin radically altered his views, or so it seemed. In "Deceptions," from *The Less Deceived* (the book that followed *The North Ship*), Larkin claimed to be no longer fooled by illusions, poetic and otherwise, and derided those who sought "fulfilment's desolate attic." When

2 *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*, by Blake Morrison. Oxford, 1980; reissued as a paperback in 1986 by Methuen.

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The North Ship was reissued in 1966, Larkin affirmed in the introduction that his youthful "Celtic fever" had long since abated and the Romantic in him was "sleeping soundly." What repudiated his early poetry most, though, were the lines of conclusively verifiable statements, untouched by any glimmer of transcendence.

The truth is, even during his Movement stage, Larkin was writing poems that went very much against the grain of Movement verse. Nevertheless, it was the Movement side of Larkin that caught the attention of readers and critics in England and America. Indeed, when Larkin started getting the attention of the major literary periodicals in the United States during the late Fifties and early Sixties, he was presented by critics such as A. Alvarez and M. L. Rosenthal as a dejected confessional poet—someone, that is, very much in the mold of Robert Lowell, who was then the commanding presence on the poetry scene. To be sure, the Movement-Larkin and the confessional writers did share a predilection for gloominess and the honest baring of it in poetry. But too many of Larkin's poems overstepped the narrow boundaries of both Movement and confessional verse for him to be comfortably placed in either group.

It should be noted, in any case, that the poems that do adhere more or less to Movement aesthetic principles are much better than most of those by other Movement poets. There are phrases and lines in Larkin that are unimaginable in, say, Kingsley Amis or Elizabeth Jennings: "Mute glorious Storyvilles," "that padlocked cube of light," "sparkling armada of promises," "salt rebuff of speech," "Lit shelved liners/Grope like mad worlds westward," and "feet/Inventing where they tread,/The random windows conjuring a street." Nor is there a Movement poet who has written so marvelous a poem as "Dockery and Son." This poem is composed entirely of standard Movement materials: anti-metaphorical language, bleak subject matter, and a distrust of any redeeming metaphysics. Yet in its overall effect the poem escapes these narrow aesthetic confines. Little in postwar English poetry is as memorable as Larkin's middle-aged ruminations on bachelorhood:

> . . . To have no son, no wife,
> No house or land still seemed quite natural.
> Only a numbness registered the shock
> Of finding out how much had gone of life,
> How widely from the others. Dockery, now:
> Only nineteen, he must have taken stock
> Of what he wanted, and been capable
> Of . . . No, that's not the difference:
> rather, how
> Convinced he was he should be added to!
> Why did he think adding meant increase?
> To me it was dilution. Where do these
> Innate assumptions come from? Not from
> what
> We think truest, or most want to do:
> Those warp tight-shut, like doors. They're
> more a style
> Our lives bring with them: habit for a while,
> Suddenly they harden into all we've got
>
> And how we got it; looked back on, they rear
> Like sand-clouds, thick and close, embodying
> For Dockery a son, for me nothing,
> Nothing with all a son's harsh patronage.
> Life is first boredom, then fear.
> Whether or not we use it, it goes,
> And leaves what something hidden from us
> chose,
> And age, and then only the end of age.

Clearly, no miracle or transcendent flash saved the poet from his fate; hence the Movement virtue of Orwellian realism is perfectly realized. The detached, empirical assessment in "Dockery and Son" is just right for the poet's emotion—an emotion Larkin remarked as having arisen from "one of those tremendous jolts life gives you sometimes, when you see what's been happening to you, and how powerless you are to do anything about it."

Even the poetry of the Movement phase that does not reach such heights is distinguished by a perceptive mastery and by vibrant language and metrical interest. In-

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deed, Larkin integrated metrical form and contemporary speech more successfully than any other poet of our time. So much of Larkin's poetry seems on first reading to be ordinary speech duly transcribed; yet there is scarcely a line that doesn't scan: "Not quite your class, I'd say, dear, on the whole"; "Canals with floatings of industrial froth"; "Approached with acres of dismantled cars"; "Naturally the Foundation Will Bear Your Expenses." What these lines show is that contemporary speech and time-honored poetic forms need not diverge. Not the least important aspect of Larkin's achievement was his sifting through the slag-heap of postwar English for such lines that merge successfully the past and the present. One can imagine Larkin pacing the floor of his Hull flat, hitting on one of these gems, eyes aglow, smiling slightly, muttering to himself (in perfect iambic tetrameter): "Mm. Well. Eureka, I suppose."

As beautifully written and on the mark as many of Larkin's Movement poems were, however, there were some experiences they could not do justice to. Larkin knew this, and willingly abandoned the Movement attitude when it no longer suited his material. Thus, in a few poems, he evoked transcendent emotions with images that Seamus Heaney has referred to as "visionary."[3] In these poems—Heaney cites "Livings," "Water," and "Solar"—the poet can be seen, in Heaney's words, "repining for a more crystalline reality" beyond the mundane rationality that governed Larkin's customary outlook. Heaney believes—and this runs contrary to what many of Larkin's critics have claimed—that the poet never entirely disowned the Symbolist and Yeatsian aesthetic of *The North Ship*.

What's interesting about "Solar" is that its Symbolist-inspired language is used to invoke the kind of hopefulness we do not normally associate with Larkin:

Suspended lion face
Spilling at the centre
Of an unfinished sky
How still you stand,
And how unaided
Single stalkless flower
You pour unrecompensed.

The eye sees you
Simplified by distance
Into an origin,
Your petalled head of flames
Continuously exploding.
Heat is the echo of your
Gold.

This evocation of the sun is totally devoid of the corrosive irony Larkin usually reserved for such objects, and thus illustrates how intent the poet was in rummaging around in "fulfilment's desolate attic." "Solar" suggests something else, too. To place the poem next to "Self's the Man" is to see how uninterested Larkin was in reconciling the oppositions within his poetry, and in himself. This was no failing; it is a testimony to his courage. Resolving these antagonisms would have meant the denial of an important aspect of Larkin's complex spirit. Larkin's reluctance to temper his clashing experiences for the sake of aesthetic conformity is one more reason his poetry will survive.

Some poems take this division of feeling as their subject. In "Days," for instance, the question posed by the childishly naïve, empirical-Larkin in the first stanza ("Where can we live but days?") is answered by the disturbing image in the second stanza. This image seems to come straight from the dream side of life—a side of life the speaker of the first stanza, one senses, can't comprehend:

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

3 See Heaney's essay, "The Main of Light," in *Larkin at Sixty*, edited by Anthony Thwaite; Faber and Faber, 1982.

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Ah, solving that question
Brings the priest and the
doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.

"High Windows," the title poem of Larkin's last book, also has a divided feeling. The first three of the poem's four stanzas consist of the caustic observations of the hidebound Larkin regarding the sexual freedom of the young. Larkin noted with dismay that the "[b]onds and gestures" that inhibited him when he was young have been callously "pushed to one side/Like an outdated combine harvester." However, in the last stanza, there is a mammoth shift in perspective. An entirely different Larkin—one who obviously doesn't believe, as the empiricists do, that meaningful statements must be conclusively verifiable—declares that

Rather than words comes the thought of
high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that
shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is
endless.

The high windows one assumed, before reading the poem, to be metaphors for an older, better world, turn out to be portals to a void that makes discussions of taste and sexual habits seem beside the point. Embracing both the trivially mundane and the spiritually momentous, "High Windows" provides a fuller and more comprehensive image of Larkin's shifting, provisional self.

"Going" (from *The Less Deceived*) doesn't have this sort of internal tension; but if it is read alongside the poem it follows in *The Less Deceived*—"Next, Please"—the effect is the same. The unequivocal sentiment of "Next, Please" (even the title suggests that we view it in light of the following poem) is that hope and expectation are misguided emotions, and all we can count on is death. The unsettling questions in "Going" attempt to wrest more from the universe than the complacent despair to be found in "Next, Please." They throw into doubt that poem's confident, empirical voice.

There is an evening coming in
Across the fields, one never seen
before,
That lights no lamps.

Silken it seems at a distance, yet
When it is drawn up over the knees and
breast
It brings no comfort.

Where has the tree gone, that locked
Earth to sky? What is under my hands,
That I cannot feel?

What loads my hands down?

A similar division of emotion is found in what have been referred to as the advertising poems in *The Whitsun Weddings*. "Sunny Prestatyn," about a travel poster defaced by a vandal; "Essential Beauty," a condemnation of billboards that "cover slums with praise/Of motor-oil and cuts of salmon"; and "The Large Cool Store," a criticism of how our "young unreal wishes" are heartlessly exploited by a store's clothing displays, have been viewed by many critics as further evidence of Larkin's desire to malign anything that attempts to propose, as he wrote in "Essential Beauty," "how life should be." The fact is, however, that there is nothing in them to sully the cause of illusions in these poems. Few of us, after all, are taken in by advertising; so how effective is Larkin's use of it as a metaphor to attack illusion? Not very, I suspect.

Although "Solar," "Days," and the advertising poems ameliorate the image of an unrelentingly disillusioned Larkin, none of them is among Larkin's finest poems. "High Windows" is better by far. But even in this splendid poem the transition in the final stanza from worldly despair to otherworldly release may be a little too abrupt. As powerful as

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"High Windows" is, the contrast between the two worlds of feeling is a bit stark.

The struggle that raged in the poet between his hopeful and unhopeful selves had been better examined in three earlier poems. "Church Going," "The Whitsun Weddings," and "At Grass": for me, these are the three greatest poems of Larkin's career. What distinguishes them from an excellent but somewhat lesser poem like "High Windows" is the more modulated and tentative shift from one realm of feeling to another. It was the kind of subtle shift Larkin evidently grew less and less capable of in his later years.

The voice with which "Church Going" begins is that of the bored atheist, to whom the empty church he visits is a baffling, rather absurd monument:

> Once I am sure there's nothing going on
> I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
> Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
> And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
> For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
> Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
> And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
> Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
> My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,
>
> Move forward, run my hand around the font.
> From where I stand, the roof looks almost new—
> Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
> Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
> Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
> 'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
> The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
> I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
> Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet five stanzas later, at the end of the poem, Larkin acknowledges an acceptance not of religious faith but of the stirrings of spiritual seriousness in him that his excursions to the church induced:

> . . . For, though I've no idea
> What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
> It pleases me to stand in silence here;
>
> A serious house on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
> Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
> And that much never can be obsolete,
> Since someone will forever be surprising
> A hunger in himself to be more serious,
> And gravitating with it to this ground,
> Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
> If only that so many dead lie round.

This isn't the kind of explosive affirmation we find in "Solar"; yet in its very guardedness there is a greater emotional force. Larkin's language mirrors the poem's shift in view. The two metaphors—the "hunger . . . to be more serious" and the feeling of "gravitating" to the ground of the Church—reflect Larkin's new approval of forces and motivations beyond the area of rational choice. And the astonishing line, "In whose blent air all our compulsions meet"—unlike anything preceding it in Larkin's poetry up to this point—suggests, in its luminousness, the new imaginative terrain Larkin was beginning to explore in this final stanza of "Church Going."

In "The Whitsun Weddings," the cautious move to generosity from despair is also prompted by an unexpected event: a wedding. This poem begins with the poet observing a suburban landscape from a train, focusing, typically, on the countryside's ugliest features: "the backs of houses," a "nondescript" town, and "acres of dismantled cars."

When a wedding party comes into view, it is the "girls/In parodies of fashion" Larkin first sees. However, by poem's end, he has learned to appreciate, even share, the emotions of the wedding party. Thus, "The Whitsun Weddings" re-enacts metaphori-

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cally the drama played out in "Church Going" and "High Windows." In the latter poem, Larkin's contemplation of the infinite emerged from the most mundane concerns. In "Church Going," a form of faith arose from the worst sort of spiritual passivity. In "The Whitsun Weddings," an emotional involvement in the wedding springs from the poet's bachelorhood. What all these poems seem to suggest is, beware of certainty, which itself may be an illusion.

Actually, "The Whitsun Weddings" deals with two weddings: the one between bride and groom, and the one between the poet and the event. Each had its own offspring: in the case of the marriage, children; in the case of Larkin, the poem. Each act is seen to represent a diminution of the miracle-denying empiricist. The poem's two weddings are a coincidence, perhaps. But the image of a fertile rain at the poem's end certainly is no chance event:

> . . . And as we raced across
> Bright knots of rail
> Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss
> Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
> Travelling coincidence; and what it held
> Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
> That being changed can give. We slowed again,
> And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
> A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
> Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

The "arrow-shower" of imaginative strength, "sent out of sight"—i.e., beyond the empiricist's view—is portrayed as vigorous enough to pull free of the ever-tightening "brakes" of the poet's intelligence.

At first glance, "At Grass"—which takes as its subject the former glory of two retired race horses—appears to be an occasion for another typically bleak Larkinesque meditation on the ravages of time. But the sense of gloom and decay with which the poem opens gives way to its opposite. Here is "At Grass" in full:

> The eye can hardly pick them out
> From the cold shade they shelter in,
> Till wind distresses tail and mane;
> Then one crops grass, and moves about
> —The other seeming to look on—
> And stands anonymous again.
>
> Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
> Two dozen distances sufficed
> To fable them: faint afternoons
> Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
> Whereby their names were artificed
> To inlay faded, classic Junes—
>
> Silks at the start: against the sky
> Numbers and parasols: outside,
> Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
> And littered grass: then the long cry
> Hanging unhushed till it subside
> To stop-press columns on the street.
>
> Do memories plague their ears like flies?
> They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.
> Summer by summer all stole away,
> The starting-gates, the crowds and cries—
> All but the unmolesting meadows.
> Almanacked, their names live; they
>
> Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
> Or gallop for what must be joy,
> And not a fieldglass sees them home,
> Or curious stop-watch prophesies:
> Only the groom, and the groom's boy,
> With bridles in the evening come.

As in "Church Going" and "The Whitsun Weddings," it seems as if the poet woke up that day yearning for something to confirm his despair; once again, he was surprised by hope. The line "They gallop for what must be joy" is another statement of faith in the possibility of joy; but also an expression of self-criticism and humility.

Interestingly, Larkin's Movement outlook is presented here, as in "The Whitsun

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Weddings," as a threat. The bridles that the groom and groom's boy bring out in the final stanza—is this a metaphor for the empirical-Larkin's desire to censor all hope? I believe it is. In beautifully depicting Larkin's internal struggle, and in acknowledging the possibility of secular faith in a godless world, "At Grass" may be Larkin's single greatest poem.

For Larkin, hope is rare; yet never so rare that it can be entirely written off. The number of poems in Larkin's oeuvre—"real" or newly expanded—exhibiting glimmers of affirmation is small: in addition to the ones discussed, there is "An Arundel Tomb," "To The Sea," "Sad Steps," "Show Saturday," and "The Explosion." Yet this small percentage seems to be a fair representation of Larkin's experience. If Larkin's verse emanated any *more* hopefulness, it could be counted on, and that wouldn't seem right.

Larkin's best poems suggest that despair may contain the seeds of hope, and that even the bleakest landscape may contain something worth praising. To overlook this central point of Larkin's verse is to make him merely the despairing spokesman for a dreary age. His work attains its distinction, in part, by resisting the idea that the human spirit can be explained purely by means of logical analysis and facts—and, by extension, psychological, historical, and sociological models. In showing the poetic imagination's ability to resist these powerful adversaries, Larkin left an important poetic legacy.

To locate this legacy the reader will have to learn to read through the many failed poems (in Larkin's eyes as well as ours) that encumber the *Collected Poems*. Yet even in a partly bungled edition it is hard not to come to the conclusion that Larkin's poetic achievement may very well be the greatest of our time.

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Erich Kahler and "the predicament of our age"

by Joseph Frank

When Erich Kahler's *The Tower and the Abyss* was first published in 1957, T. S. Eliot made some striking comments about it that are very helpful in explaining why the work, after the passage of thirty years, continues to retain its exemplary value. In response to an inquiry from the *Sunday Times* about the book that had made the greatest impact on him in the past year, Eliot referred to Kahler's exploration of the perils to which modern man has now become exposed. "Whether one agrees with the author or not," Eliot said, "what he writes must provoke fresh thinking on the part of any reader capable of that exertion. There have been many books written on 'the predicament of our age,' some of which I have read, but none of which has impressed me more deeply. Few books in its field of thought since Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* have stirred and disturbed my mind so deeply." These laudatory words, from a poet and critic hardly given to unduly expansive evaluations, are enough to guarantee the perennial interest of Kahler's pages. But it is not so much Eliot's praise that is notable as his remark on the capacity of Kahler to stimulate thought independent of agreement or disagreement. This is always the sign of a book with a vision destined to rise above its time, the reading of which becomes a vital experience quite transcending the terms of common intellectual argument.

Erich Kahler, who came to the United States as an exile from Hitler's Germany in 1938 and, after a distinguished career as a university professor and free-lance intellectual, died in 1970, belonged to that great wave of German emigration, provoked by Nazi barbarism, which did so much to enrich American cultural life. Born in Prague, like Kafka and Rilke, Kahler gravitated toward Munich as a young man and in his early days was among the admirers and disciples (many, though not all, of Jewish origin) who gathered around the great poet Stefan George. Little known outside of Germany, George has sometimes been considered a precursor of Nazism because of his insistence on the importance of inner discipline and obedience to a higher spiritual authority; actually he went into exile in Switzerland when Hitler came to power. Paying a moving tribute to his old master in 1964 for the benefit of new generations, Erich Kahler is quite critical of some aspects of the movement that George inaugurated and whose *Heilslehre* (doctrine of salvation) he had never shared; but he expresses his everlasting gratitude to George for having taught and brought home to him one ineradicable truth: "In the whirlwind of historical happenings, [*man*] *has to have something on which he stands and for which he stands*, and that this *something* must be *the form and dignity of mankind*." One can say that Erich Kahler dedicated the remainder of his life to wrestling with the problem of how this form and dignity of mankind could be preserved and fostered in the midst of

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the "whirlwinds" of his (and our) time.

Before leaving Germany, Erich Kahler had been engaged in a major exploration of the German character as shaped by the history of German culture. The one volume he published, which Thomas Mann called "a standard for the psychology of Germanness," remained unfinished because of Kahler's emigration. After this, he launched into his next major work, *Man the Measure* (1944), which once again elicited Mann's praise. Celebrating the book on the occasion of Kahler's sixtieth birthday, Mann spoke of it as being "no more and no less than the novel of mankind, narrated by a poetic thinker and historical rhapsode, inspired by the deep feeling that 'in this gravest of human crises nothing is more urgent, nothing more vital than the knowledge of man, of his historical background and the direction of his evolution.'" Mann has only one gentle reproof to make to his friend: that a study whose origins are so self-evidently in German culture should have been written in English.

Thomas Mann is of course absolutely right to imply that no Anglo-American historian (one should perhaps make an exception for Arnold Toynbee) would have undertaken a work like *Man the Measure*. For Erich Kahler belongs squarely in the great German tradition of polymaths represented by such names as Oswald Spengler, Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and Ernst Cassirer, all of whom followed in the footsteps of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* by taking the entire sweep of mankind's historical and cultural evolution as their province. *Man the Measure* was precisely such an attempt to survey the whole course of human history and, even more, to give some coherent significance to this grandiose spectacle of the unending succession of civilizations. "History implies a continuity of something more than time," Kahler wrote, " . . . otherwise it would be nothing but an incoherent mass of rising and falling powers . . . . Eternity has no history and neither does chaos." It is Erich Kahler's search for this continuity that enabled him to give history a narrative structure and justified Thomas Mann's comparison of the work to a majestic "novel of mankind."

The Tower and the Abyss, as Erich Kahler explains in the preface, took its origin from this earlier work and carried some of its conclusions even further in light of the horrifying new material that began to emerge at the end of the Second World War. Kahler first sketched some of his ideas in talks given in 1947, and continued to elaborate them through 1955, when they were put into final shape for the Christian Gauss lectures at Princeton University; the final text was published a year later. What runs through the book is the fear expressed in the subtitle ("the transformation of man"): that history had reached a point which no longer allowed us to imagine that "the form and dignity of mankind" would continue to be taken as a "measure," and that perhaps human reality had undergone a fearful metamorphosis. Although documentation is lacking on the point, it is certainly plausible that the shock of learning the full truth about the Nazi concentration camps, combined with the explosion of the first atomic bomb, impelled Erich Kahler to project such a somber hypothesis about the human condition as a whole.

What is this "transformation" of which Kahler speaks? It is, in the first place, the steady replacement of "the community" (the basic natural form of human association which structures the personality and inculcates values) by "the collective" (the artificial associations formed to achieve certain limited purposes and particular ends). Such "collectives" have of course existed in all historical epochs; but what has become decisive in our time, according to Kahler, is that modern collectives have become dissociated from the communities with which they had always retained some connection. The result, as he writes, has been "a gradual disruption of the human self, the individual's growing alienation from the world and ultimately from himself." The human personality on a worldwide scale has thus become fractured and schizophrenic. "Collectivization splits [it] into a

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collective, functional part and a human, actually individual part which grows more and more atrophied."

In the first section of his book, Kahler deals with all the pressures from *without* that reshape the personality in this way, beginning with the involuntary effects of science and technology. These have led to the rationalization of human life, what Kahler calls its "scientification"—that is, the growth of "specialization, functionalization, standardization, anonymization." As Kahler writes, "in this way, the concrete human particularity of the unique individual is displaced by the abstract particularity of the collectively specialized function." Combined with such processes, which are the unforeseen consequences of some of the greatest achievements of the human mind, the human personality also becomes imperiled by the "totalization and terror" purposely introduced on "the part of the supreme collective, the state, to wreck the structure of the individual." If the United States, as Kahler believes, seemed predestined to represent the most extreme development of the unintended extroversion of the individual produced by "scientification," then the whole course of German history (and here of course Kahler is drawing on his earlier studies) appears to have marked that country out to accomplish the frightful apotheosis of this willful destruction of the human personality.

In a brilliant sketch, Kahler examines how the German character first became split by political disunity and then by Luther's insistence on faith rather than works as the guarantee of salvation—to which Luther added the injunction of absolute obedience to earthly, secular authorities. This created a glaring disparity between inner values and behavior whose results can be seen in some of the hallucinatory documentation that Kahler produces to illustrate the monstrous disjunction between the private comportment and the official acts of German execution squads, Nazi concentration-camp commanders, and the "doctors of infamy" engaged in their ghastly experiments on human guinea pigs. Nor does Kahler accept the view, more widespread now than when he was writing, that such atrocities can be found to have their counterparts in the unending history of human wickedness. Past horrors, he insists, always retained some link with "a personal focus," no matter how cruel or misbegotten, while "what we are facing in the modern atrocities is the absence of anything human." Kahler also rejects the semi-apologetic opinion that the Nazi extermination of the Jews differed in quantity but not in kind from the mass atrocities of the past—for example, the hecatombs of Genghis Khan's armies. These massacres, he points out, were carried out by people who had not "undergone the smoothing and sensibilizing effects of a world religion," who had never been taught the "special dignity of the human being, the human quality common to all men." Their actions were thus not a slump from a higher to a lower level of human responsiveness.

This analysis of what Kahler calls "the split from without" contains some perceptive remarks on how the growth of collectivist experience has been expressed in the arts. In his second major section, "the split from within," Kahler focuses on the arts more extensively in order to catch the changes in sensibility that have been brought about by the historical panorama he has been unrolling. The book contains what is in effect a small anthology of modern poetry in four languages, including selections from Eliot himself, on which Kahler comments with great sensitivity. What he finds in all of them is the expression of "an overwhelming, often enrapturing feeling of the simultaneity, the whirling co-existence of the disparate and fragmentary multitude that populates our life and our consciousness: *all-embracement of discontinuity*. In some poets such feeling led to a contraction, a spiritual transcendence of time." One can well understand why such pages should not have left Eliot indifferent.

Kahler also traces this "split from within" in terms of cultural history, where it appeared self-consciously in the growing dissatisfaction with civilization that has been manifest at least since the eighteenth century and that found its most eloquent spokesman

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in Rousseau. Kahler details this process with his usual mastery of the widest variety of philosophical, literary, and artistic expressions; and he notes in all of them the gradual disappearance of the organic individual as a center and controlling focus. This led to the exploration of new dimensions of reality in the realm of art, and to the extension of human consciousness. Kahler is of course properly appreciative of the great artists who, dissatisfied with the usual contours of the world, began to explore its component aspects—thus providing new sensations and new techniques (such as the stream-of-consciousness in literature) to uncover hidden realms of experience. The end result of these aesthetic conquests, all the same, has been the fracturing and dismemberment of the human image until it has vanished entirely in abstract art or, for that matter, in *Finnegans Wake*. On the level of thought, both the uncertainty about the ultimate nature of reality created by the discoveries of modern physics and the systematic examination of man's inner life initiated by psychoanalysis worked toward the same end.

Kahler was writing his book in the years when French existentialism had just burst upon the world, and he sees "the existentialist experience" as the despairing attempt to cope with the crisis created, at least for Western man, by the disappearance of all objective structures of value. Existentialism, however, had been developed primarily by German or Northern European thinkers, and Kahler quotes passages from Rilke and Hofmannsthal which anticipate by half a century the same anguish of emptiness and contingency recorded in Sartre's *La Nausée*. This "existentialist experience" stems from an unprecedented predicament in the history of mankind, some of the symptoms of which may have existed previously in isolated individuals but never on such a massive scale and as an issue of general import and moral-philosophical concern. "I do not know of any document relating such a consciously sustained and far-reaching existential experience before the beginning of our century," writes the prodigiously well-informed Kahler, "whereas since 1900 it has been expressed by more authors than could be quoted here, before and independent of explicit existentialism."

What has occurred, Kahler concludes, is more than a crisis of values; these have always been precarious, and all the great religions have sought to teach them. And it is more than just a "devaluation of specific values, [or] a mere invalidation of a world of values; *it is a dwindling of the faculty of valuation altogether*." Man no longer feels himself capable of exercising the moral responsibility of choice in the name of values, and simply surrenders to the determinism of science and the *functional responsibilities* created by the various collectives which now structure and dominate in society. Criminality tends to be excused as a consequence of causes beyond the individual's control; the very conception of human responsibility is on the point of vanishing. But this leads to the defense made by the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials—that they were merely obeying orders. "Any bit of human responsibility that was left in them was blocked out by the collective compulsion." Only in a world where individuals no longer feel responsible to a human community could such deeds have been possible.

Here then is the grim picture that Kahler paints of the predicament of the modern age, and it cannot be said that the past thirty years have infirmed the acuity of his diagnosis in any way. Indeed, many aspects of *The Tower and the Abyss* can be said to have been prophetic. Kahler saw the dangers of modern technology—imaged most clearly in the awesome power of the atom bomb—as a worldwide problem that transcended the usual political divisions between Right and Left and that required a worldwide response. The rise of the ecological movement, which Kahler himself labeled utopian in 1957, has amply confirmed this insight, and it justifies his laconic remark that the presumably utopian is in fact now the only practical hope for the future. Moreover, the astonishing recrudescence of ethnic and linguistic

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nationalism as a force in the modern world—much less evident in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War—constitutes strong evidence for Kahler's basic thesis that human life requires roots in a community that provides a source of values.

To be sure, Kahler was well aware that the values governing communities are far from always being benign and bring with them their own perils. "Such archaic residues," he writes, "may be used and misused by groups of a different character, by political and economic power interests . . . . They may swamp everything that is actually individual in a person, sweeping away his conscious ego, his clear thinking." This passage reveals a tension between the individual and the community which Kahler passes over all too lightly and which points to one of the weaknesses of his basic categories—a weakness endemic to the entire organic school of German social thought to which he belongs. One of the major criticisms of the book (quite justified, in my view) was that Kahler underestimates, even if he did not overlook, the hazards of these "archaic residues" in the human personality; they can be more menacing than some of the relatively harmless collectives he excoriates. However that may be, Kahler argues that, even if misused, the influence of such archaic residues "do not by themselves alone break up the structure of personality." But here we have an excellent illustration of how little difference it makes whether one agrees or disagrees with Kahler's specific judgments. Much more important is that he truly foresaw how irrepressible was the human need for such natural and communal value-orientations, and that he warns against creating a world in which the dominance of collectives seemed to be wiping them out.

It is paradoxical that while the revolt against collectives can now be observed to be taking place everywhere (even, after half a century of ceaseless propaganda for "internationalism," in the multi-national Soviet Union), and while such a revolt is accompanied by a revival of religion whose first stirrings Kahler noted but refused to accept as authentic, the latest and most fashionable currents of Western thought should be proceeding in the opposite direction. Kahler's book stops with existentialism, which still felt the loss of values in tragic terms and dramatized it in such works as Sartre's *La Nausée* and Camus's *L'Etranger*, as well as analyzing it in the theoretical writings of the same authors. But succeeding movements such as structuralism (Lévi-Strauss) and post-structuralism (Foucault, Derrida) reject human subjectivity altogether as a basis for understanding the world and thus carry further that functionalization of the human, in abject imitation of the physical sciences, whose consequences Kahler so penetratingly portrayed. Foucault and Derrida are followers of Heidegger, whose wholehearted commitment to Nazism as a political movement, if not to some of its cruder theoretical formulations, has recently been documented more amply than in the past; and they explicitly reject "humanism," with its implications of subjectivity and moral responsibility, as a totally outmoded approach to the problems confronting modern thought and the comprehension of the contemporary cultural situation. Other French Heideggerians, in an astonishing perversion of ideas, have even accused "humanism" itself of being responsible for Nazism.

One wishes that Kahler were still alive to confront these champions of a tendency of thought which regards with equanimity, and even with exuberance, the disappearance of "the human" as a special category of value. But a renewed acquaintance with *The Tower and the Abyss*, where he marshals so much overwhelming, irrefutable, and frightening evidence of what the loss of a sense of "the human" has already entailed for mankind as a whole, may help to remind new generations of some vital truths that have been all too easily forgotten.

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Zola and the Commune

by Frederick Brown

Born in Paris on April 2, 1840, Emile Zola was raised in Aix-en-Provence, where his father, an Italian engineer, had been hired by the municipality to build its waterworks. François Zola died just as construction began and the prospect of wealth turned into a nightmare of litigation from which his widow emerged penniless. This loss had lifelong effects on Emile. Another loss occurred when Madame Zola took her seventeen-year-old son north to Paris. Torn from his bosom friends, Paul Cézanne and Jean-Baptistin Baille, he drifted unhappily through late adolescence, failing the baccalaureate examination, vainly seeking employment, and discovering the squalid side of bohemia.

In 1862, fortune smiled at last. He was given a clerkship by Hachette and Company, and soon became the firm's publicity director. In that position he established a network of contacts throughout the newspaper world. He also produced a novel entitled *La Confession de Claude* (having previously written quantities of bad verse in the style of Musset). Four years at Hachette persuaded him that he could earn his livelihood in journalism. Indeed, he had already contributed long articles to *Le Salut Public*, a paper in Lyon. And so he made the leap, quitting Hachette at about the same time he was setting up house with his future wife, Gabrielle Alexandrine Meley.

Polemics marked Zola's career from the outset. *L'Evénement* had him review the 1866 Salon, and in articles ridiculing Academic art he championed painters shunned by officialdom, notably Edouard Manet, who became a friend. In 1867, he caused another stir with his somber novel about guilt-ridden murderers, *Thérèse Raquin*. Denounced as an exponent of naturalism, or what one journalist dubbed "la littérature putride," Zola stood firm and soon thereafter laid plans for the voluminous saga that would bring him fame, *Les Rougon-Macquart*. These quarrels took place during the waning years of the Second Empire, when political institutions, as well as artistic conventions, came under attack. Republicans who had fought underground since 1851 openly defied Napoleon III, opposition newspapers multiplied, and in several of them—*La Tribune, Le Rappel, La Cloche*—Zola joined battle against the decrepit regime.

No sooner had he begun writing *La Fortune des Rougon* than war interrupted his agenda. Germany won major victories in Alsace-Lorraine. Napoleon III abdicated after the loss of Sedan, and on September 4, 1870, Republican deputies, led by a young lawyer named Léon Gambetta, formed a "Government of National Defense." Two weeks later, General Von Moltke surrounded Paris, whereupon Gambetta established himself at Tours, hoping to rally provincial France against the Prussian juggernaut.

Meanwhile, Zola had made good his escape. Exempt from military service

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because he was an only son, he fled Paris on September 7 with mother, wife, and dog in tow. Before long, they reached Marseille, where Zola found cheap quarters in midtown, little suspecting that he would not see the capital again for nine months, or that he would return to see it ruled by a revolutionary commune and besieged by fellow Frenchmen.

When Napoleon III fell, his regime shattered even more clamorously down south than up north. Marseille's radicals had run riot, looting the arsenal to equip squads of worker-police and organizing committees to disinfect the army, the municipal administration, and the judiciary. This movement spread inland and revolutionary communes throughout southeastern France banded together in a "Ligue du Midi."

As a seasoned Parisian journalist, Zola might have induced some regional paper to let him write chronicles or causeries. He knew extremely well the editors of both *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* and *Le Messager de Provence*. But it seems that Marseille galvanized the entrepreneur in him. "What if we put out a small paper in Marseille during our enforced sojourn?" he asked Marius Roux, a boyhood friend who had returned to Aix. Roux, a journalist by trade, leapt at the chance, whereupon Zola appointed Paul Alexis, yet another transplanted Aixois, his Paris correspondent. "What we'd like is this," he wrote Alexis. "*Every day*, without worrying whether or not your letters get through, send us ten or twenty lines about important events, a simple resumé."

In the event, he never heard from Alexis, for by then Paris, which Von Moltke had sealed tight, needed birds and balloons to communicate with the outside world. Balloonists under fire from below often jettisoned mail in order to gain altitude, and if Alexis had sent reports, as likely as not they would have landed unread on some fallow field. Zola did not yet know this in late September, when he launched *La Marseillaise*.

Though the name he chose obviously evoked a town and a hymn, it also put readers in mind of another paper, a Parisian *Marseillaise* whose chief editor, Henri Rochefort, had pilloried Napoleon III with abandon. Of Zola's *Marseillaise*, one can say little more than that its name bespoke its radical agenda, as no copies survive. What promise it gave during its first weeks may be inferred from the contract Zola drew up on October 29 ceding ownership to Gustave Naquet, who in 1869 had founded another left-wing journal, *Le Peuple*. "As of November 1, 1870," Zola wrote, "we cede to you ownership of *La Marseillaise*, a daily paper selling for 5 centimes, which has a circulation of about 10,000." Concerning the upcoming elections for the Constituent Assembly, he added: "We declare in advance our intention to back the Republican Committee's list [of candidates]."

Scarcely one month later gloom settled over the enterprise. Workers insisted on higher wages and created such havoc when management rebuffed them that there was some thought of having the paper printed in Arles. After November its daily appearance became altogether problematical. Zola and Roux struggled to keep it alive, but with little encouragement from Naquet, who may have viewed *La Marseillaise* as a millstone around his neck or as a rival *Le Peuple* could ill afford. The last issue appeared on December 16.

This fiasco led Zola to conclude that he had best renounce journalism for the moment and try his luck in the Donnybrook Fair of French politics. Hankering after some administrative job, he petitioned Albert Glais-Bizoin, a founder of Paris's *La Tribune* who was at this time minister without portfolio under Gambetta. "I find myself at loose ends in the Midi and am ashamed of it," Zola wrote. "Does the Republic have some post for me—a prefecture or subprefecture? I should not like to leave the Midi, where I am very well known and where my father rendered great public service."

While he awaited an answer, the war took a turn for the worse. Early in December,

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Germany crushed French troops at Orléans, some seventy miles upstream from Tours. Gambetta, realizing that his perch had become untenable, decided to relocate the provincial delegation of the Government of National Defense. An exodus southward to Bordeaux began forthwith, ministry by ministry, and close behind trooped office-seekers, one of whom was Zola himself. He left his family on December 11, boarded a train, and arrived twenty-four hours later, in cold, wet weather.

Where Taine, in *Journeys Through France*, called Bordeaux a "second Paris, gay and magnificent, with its wide streets, promenades, monuments, large mansions," Zola took a more dismal view of the city. "It rains continually," he complained to his wife, Alexandrine. "I rise at eight and eat a small loaf. Then I run errands and loiter under the theater arcade until noon. At noon I lunch at the Chapon Fin, then sleep and read until dinnertime. At nine I retire. Not what you'd call a wildly gay existence."

On December 17, after one week of hectic lobbying, Zola received word that the town he had hoped to govern as sub-prefect, Aix-en-Provence, was spoken for. He would have left Bordeaux right away had an interview with Glais-Bizoin not steeled his resolve. "He told me that he had received my letter," Zola wrote, "then led me to the telegraph office and train station. He runs like a hare. When we parted I said: 'I'm counting on you.' And he answered: 'Absolutely. I want you on board. This situation can't continue. I'll take charge of things.'"

Glais-Bizoin was an ebullient little man whose political career spanned four regimes. He had been nipping authority since 1830 without ever quite inflicting serious damage, and his droll figure made him a gift to the caricaturist. "He has a bird's head and birdlike vivacity," wrote one observer. "If not for his long tenure on the extreme Left, one might conclude that he can't sit still. He is small, thin, dark-skinned, bony, with eyes that glow like coals under beetling brows. All quicksilver, he accurately records barometric pressure from the opposition." As a minister under Gambetta, Glais-Bizoin performed only honorific functions, it being rumored that at seventy his mind no longer reasoned efficiently.

This rumor worried Zola. Afraid that the old trooper might wander never to be found again, he kept after him and in due course was rewarded for his persistence. "I have good news, but since the arrangement is not yet definitive, I hardly dare tell you about it," he announced on December 20.

> This morning, so as not to miss Glais-Bizoin, I stood for one full hour, in driving rain, at the door of his residence. He finally emerged with some big rascal of a Spaniard who claims he has a secret strategy for beating the Prussians. I let them walk several steps then accosted Glais-Bizoin as if by chance. He led me to a café and wanted to order me hot chocolate; since I know he's a tightwad I refused, which must have pleased him. At length the Spaniard departed and I could chat. I said to him: "If you had offices, I'd ask for a little corner in one of them." He responded: "I have only one secretary, but he's in Vannes. Do you want his job?"

As Glais-Bizoin's offer meant that he would remain in Bordeaux until the political situation clarified itself, Zola brought his wife and mother from Marseille. No sooner had they regrouped, however, than the political situation changed dramatically. On January 28, 1871, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs negotiated an armistice whose central provision was that France would, in free elections, form a government with which Germany could treat. When word of it reached Bordeaux, Gambetta took umbrage. Instructed to announce elections for February 8, he obeyed, but in a spirit of defiance. "Let us make use of the Armistice as a school to enlighten our young troops," ran one decree placarded on streets throughout Bordeaux. "In place of the reactionary and cowardly Assembly of which the enemy dreams, let us install an Assembly that is truly national and republican, desiring peace, if peace assures our honor . . . but

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capable of willing war also, ready for anything rather than lend a hand in the murder of France." Nevertheless, he honored what he acknowledged to be the general will and resigned his ministries. Up north, the siege of Paris ended and wagons laden with food entered the city for the first time in four months.

Zola may not have understood just how wise he had been to leave Paris until stories of life under siege reached him from the capital. After Von Moltke encircled Paris on September 19, many writers and artists rallied to its defense by joining the National Guard, a formerly bourgeois militia that now accepted volunteers of every description. Manet was commissioned lieutenant and served in the artillery under Ernest Meissonier, an Academic painter famous for his battle scenes. Degas commuted between Montmartre and a gun emplacement in the outer fortifications, ten miles away. Paul Alexis did guard duty at the Batignolles town hall. Philippe Solari, a sculptor whom Zola had known since childhood, performed inane drills on various parade grounds. Trapped by an enemy they couldn't engage, all these men played at war but starved in earnest, along with several million others. "I spent all my time queueing up at the door of butchers, bakers, coalmen, marching, standing at the fortifications," Solari recounted to Zola in February 1871. "What an existence! It's unbelievable the suffering we endured and the things we ate. There was nothing left in Paris but black pudding and stringy horsemeat, expensive and dry, ever so dry. . . . I almost ate a dog's head, which the butcher sold as veal." Once the quarter million sheep grazing in the Bois de Bologne had been consumed, Parisians dined on rat pie or, if they had Victor Hugo's means, on bear and elephant slaughtered at the zoo.

Those who had not shared the common ordeal often felt stigmatized, morally diminished, or even unmanned by their absence, and Zola was the more susceptible to such feelings for having been exempt from military service. "How are you? How did you get through the siege?" he asked Paul Alexis in a letter written on February 4. "Now you are a man. The siege and its sufferings have made you a citizen of Paris. You are no longer Aixois and when we see each other again, I shall greet you as a compatriot."

We don't know how Alexis read this pompous accolade, but certainly Zola wanted it understood that he himself had long since undergone initiation, that years of "struggle" in mufti equaled several months of resistance in uniform. To drive home the point, Zola aggrandized his civilian status. "With Roux we founded, in Marseille, a newspaper that survived two months," he wrote. "Then, at the beginning of December, I was summoned to the government delegation as private secretary to Glais-Bizoin." Answering a call from above sounded very impressive indeed. And furthermore, the word "summoned" (*appelé*) had a military connotation.

As shame made him boastful, so the idea that he had lost face and purchase in the capital sparked righteous indignation. When Manet informed him that some refugees had been billeted in Zola's little house at 14, rue de la Condamine, near Clichy, Zola fired off an anxious letter to Alexis. "Please go there," he wrote, "and tell me what shape things are in."

> Has the garden been ruined? Which rooms have been offered to the occupants? Is my study one of them? . . . Have they respected the papers in my desk, my file case, and my secretary? Are there any broken dishes? . . . I hope . . . that the occupation of my domicile took place in accordance with the law, properly supervised by a commissioner. I also hope that the seals have been affixed and that an inventory has been made. Otherwise I'm prepared to press charges against those responsible. My situation is special: the house of a government official should, by rights, have been left alone. Please tell this to the concierge, to the landlord, to the mayor, to everyone you see. In short, I demand that my house be evacuated as soon as possible. Depending on events, I may return to

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> Paris from one day to the next and I'll have to fumigate before moving back in. I count on you to tell me if I can return to my quarters without walking through the debris of my furniture and pots. What a mess it must be, my poor study, where I began my *Rougon-Macquart* with such fervor.

Memories of pied-à-terre where he lived for years one step removed from the poorhouse still threatened him, no doubt. Zola longed for substance, and this questionnaire conjures up an image of him gorging his future villa at Médan with antiquarian furniture as if to reassure himself by the sheer weight of it that he could never again be taken lightly.

Another five weeks elapsed before Zola ascertained for himself that his unbidden guests had left everything intact. Meanwhile, Paris invaded Bordeaux—or so it seemed, as journalists, power-brokers, actresses, and boulevardiers flocked south to observe the newly elected National Assembly, and to convalesce. Second Empire high life resumed after a drear intermission. "Hotels were taken by storm," wrote one observer. "Theaters were booked solid every night. Bordeaux's population grew hourly, and almost all the deputies arrived before the inaugural meeting." One deputy who came late was Victor Hugo, who was hailed en route from Paris by crowds shouting "Vive Victor Hugo! Vive la République!"

On February 18, Adolphe Thiers was elected chief executive of the National Assembly with a mandate to negotiate at Versailles. Ten days later he set forth Bismarck's draconian terms. Germany wanted Alsace and Lorraine, in addition to a huge indemnity of five billion francs. On March 1, the French legislature yielded. "Today a tragic session," Hugo wrote in his diary. "First the Empire was executed, then, alas, France herself! They voted the Shylock-Bismarck treaty."

Zola lost no time shaping circumstance to his advantage by offering Louis Ulbach, the editor of *La Cloche* in Paris, daily reports on the legislature. "All of France has its attention focused on what happens here," he argued. "We can arrange the fee however you like." A response came without delay: "Your proposition is irresistible. Send me what you like or what you can, and I'll pay you as best I can."

Zola took his assignment seriously. *La Cloche* was given a vivid account of the issues that set Paris against the provinces, conservatives against Republicans, moderate Republicans against radical. When clashes occurred, he analyzed them. When parliamentary debate flagged, he noted talk-of-the-town. When Thiers's sojourn in Versailles left Bordeaux free to conjecture about peace negotiations, he evoked the atmosphere of a citywide rumor mill. When he had done portraying major figures, he caricatured squireens in quaint headgear and unfashionable overcoats who seemed to have emerged from a time warp for this one momentous conclave. "How many bald pates aglow under the great chandelier! I was scrutinizing them just now, studying the countenance of worried landowners."

Throughout, Zola the reporter called upon Zola the novelist, and the novelist manifested himself right away, in an article dated February 19: "Imagine if you will a mortuary chapel," he wrote of the Grand-Théatre, where the Assembly had just agreed to negotiate an armistice. "At 2:00 P.M., dazzled by sunlight, one falls into an auditorium lit by three chandeliers. Red plush seats below, and above, on the stage, whose curtain is raised, a dais with purple bunting set in the midst of drawing-room décor. There's where France will be put to death. One searches dark corners for the hangman. In the loges, many women, a first-night audience. Gloved hands hold lorgnettes." Ten days later, after Thiers divulged Bismarck's terms, he wrote: "When I left the auditorium, at nightfall, the crowd stood in the gloaming, anxious and hungry for more news . . . . Ah! the sun has set this evening, and Bordeaux has put on mourning clothes."

Such language annoyed Ulbach, who took a moderate position in supporting Adolphe Thiers against deeper-dyed Republicans. But

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on the whole he saw eye to eye with his reporter, and compliments certainly outnumbered cavils. Ulbach had already assured Zola that he could, if he so desired, remain *La Cloche*'s legislative correspondent once the Assembly moved north. With this prospect to buoy him, and a second income expected from *Le Sémaphore de Marseille*, for which he would write some one thousand eight hundred articles during the 1870s, Zola left Bordeaux on March 13. At its penultimate meeting in the Grand-Théatre, the Assembly voted to reconvene on March 20 in yet another theater—the theater of the Palace of Versailles.

As the consummate symbol of absolute monarchy, Versailles conveyed a political message that worried Republicans. But there was already trouble afoot in Paris, where economic misery had been compounded by the Assembly's decision to terminate wartime moratoria on rent and debt. After February 8, Republicans took for granted that provincial deputies would insist on restoring monarchical government. Indignation at this prospect voiced itself through the National Guard, which emerged as a quasi-political organism on February 24. Delegates from some two hundred battalions ratified statutes of federation and swore never to surrender arms or to recognize any commander-in-chief chosen by Thiers. In a revival meeting at the Place de la Bastille, orators harangued large crowds, and for three days National Guard bands played martial music, lowering their banners as they trooped past a Liberty draped in red cloth.

Adolphe Thiers rode up from Bordeaux in high dudgeon, and his reappearance was a spark to tinder. Although this eloquent Provençal fought hard against Napoleon III, working-class Frenchmen hated him for sins older than the Second Empire. Almost forty years before, as Louis-Philippe's Interior Minister, he had ordered General Bugeaud to crush striking Lyonnais silk workers in what came to be called the "massacre of the rue Transnonain." Nor had people forgotten his denunciation of the "vile Multitude" in June 1848, when yet another massacre took place. Thiers may have shrunk since then, but the little man who wrote volumes about Napoleon I yielded nothing of his belief in the sacredness of private property. All five feet of him argued a political vision that incriminated the nomad, the immigrant, the socialist, the crowd.

Thiers was far from seeking to assuage the National Guard, or the Central Committee it elected midway through March. Rather, he resolved to sweep aside this mutinous group with a *coup de main* and subjugate Paris before the National Assembly reconvened in Versailles. His first attempt, however, resulted in disaster.

Early on the morning of March 18, his troops, led by General Lecomte, seized the formidable battery atop Montmartre. It soon became clear, however, that without equipment to transport the cannons downhill, nothing had been accomplished. The time spent summoning horse teams proved fatal. Within two hours, the army found itself marooned in a sea of villagers. "By the time a column of National Guards arrived," writes one historian, "the essential distance between troops and citizens had become gravely compromised."

> Women from the crowd thrust themselves between the two groups shouting to the troops, "Will you fire on us? On your brothers? Our husbands? Our children?" Four times Lecomte vainly ordered his men to fire. In this expectant silence [a warrant officer] called on his fellow soldiers to ground their arms and the crowd surged forward to embrace the troops crying "Long live the line." The gendarmes were overrun and disarmed before they could fire, the officers were pulled off their horses and Lecomte himself was seized. By nine in the morning it was all over.

Neither the National Guard nor Montmartre's mayor, Georges Clemenceau, could control the mob, which vented its rage on Lecomte and on a retired general named Clément Thomas, whom curiosity had drawn to the boulevard Clichy. "Everyone

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was shrieking like wild beasts, without realizing what they were doing," Clemenceau recounted. "I observed then that pathological phenomenon which might be called blood lust." Both generals were found at nightfall riddled with bullets.

For Thiers, reports of troops breaking ranks all over town brought back memories of February 1848. On that occasion he had urged King Louis-Philippe to leave Paris and recapture it from without. Louis-Philippe rejected his advice, but now God alone stood above him. No sooner had he beat a retreat than he issued general evacuation orders. Forty-eight hours later, on March 22, Versailles officially declared Paris under siege.

The National Guard's Central Committee became, perforce, an alternative government. "We have only one goal," it announced on March 20: "the safety of the country and the final triumph of the democratic Republic, one and indivisible." On March 26, Paris was proclaimed a Commune in front of City Hall. Forming up to music first heard during the great Revolution, National Guard battalions played the "Marseillaise" as people sang *en masse* and cannon fired salvos.

Zola may have seen something of the tumultuous demonstration that rocked Clichy on March 18, but events came much closer when he began to shuttle between Paris and Versailles as *La Cloche*'s legislative correspondent. On March 20 he was detained at the Gare Saint-Lazare by guards who undoubtedly knew that his editor-in-chief, Louis Ulbach, had earned an arrest warrant for denouncing the Central Committee. One day later, he fell foul of a minor official in Versailles who took him to be an insurgent and had him jailed at the Orangerie until his credentials were verified. "Bothered by the Central Committee yesterday, suspected by the Executive Power today," he wrote, "I'm pinching myself, anxiously probing my soul, and wondering if it wouldn't be wise to pack up. What comforts me is the knowledge that there isn't some third government to arrest me tomorrow."

Zola's "Lettres de Versailles" constitute a tirade against the intransigence of extremists. "Between the dissidents of City Hall and the blind bigots of the Assembly [at Versailles], France lies bleeding," he wrote on March 23. "If, one day, history tells us how the insurrection pushed her over the edge, it will add that the regular and legitimate power did everything to make her plunge fatal." By then it was altogether clear that a policy of conciliation would find few friends right of center. George Clemenceau implored Versailles to hold municipal elections under its own auspices and thus blunt the Commune's Central Committee, but his plea went unheard. "Meeting follows meeting, and emptiness yawns ever wider," Zola despaired. "This is a firm resolve! Paris doesn't exist for them, and its non-existence sums up their political agenda." Of the Commune's municipal elections, he wrote: "I do not represent my paper, only myself, when I declare, as I do now, that tomorrow I shall vote." Like many Republicans, Zola voted *against* civil war rather than *for* the Commune.

La Cloche being one of twenty-eight Paris newspapers to declare the elections illegal, Ulbach might have given Zola notice, or put him on a shorter leash, if Zola had not loudly proclaimed faith in Adolphe Thiers's shrewdness and good will. Almost everyone knew that Thiers was building up the army, but Zola interpreted evidence of belligerent intentions as nothing more than a clever ploy. "What will M. Thiers's conduct be [now that the elections are over]?" he asked. "It is said in Versailles that he favors compromise, reasonable agreement . . . ."

Zola's outlook was to change after April 3. On that day three columns of National Guards west of Paris, near Chatillon, mounted a reckless counterattack on the French Army, who had earlier captured a bridgehead at the Seine. Led to expect that the army would fraternize with them, as it had two weeks earlier in Clichy, the National Guards entered the woods like boisterous

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picnickers. Many were slaughtered right away, others were mercilessly hunted down, and several thousand were herded through Versailles, where civilians beat them with canes and umbrellas.

The disaster boosted Thiers's confidence immeasurably. The Commune, meanwhile, decreed three days later, on April 6, that anyone suspected of complicity with Versailles would be arrested, tried, and, if convicted, held hostage. It decreed, furthermore, that three such hostages would die for every prisoner of war or partisan of the Commune who was executed by the enemy.

Chatillon, especially the jubilant air with which Thiers announced victory, made Zola doubt himself. "Where I heard him express egotistical and bourgeois satisfaction, I would have preferred to hear him say: 'Gentlemen, I am greatly aggrieved; today brothers have fought once again and sorrow attends our victory. I beg you to be tolerant, to insist that this struggle cease right away.'" After April 6, the worst seemed inevitable. "Heart-broken, I must tell you," he told readers of *La Cloche*, "conciliation is a pipe-dream. In Versailles, Paris seems very far away and people there imagine our poor metropolis swarming with bandits, all indiscriminately fit to gun down."

In Paris, Communards were spoiling for Armageddon as fervently as right-wing deputies. "The communal revolution," it was proclaimed on April 19, "inaugurates a new era of scientific, positive, experimental politics." The insurrectionists' manifesto was fraught with terms elsewhere used by writers like Zola to legitimize naturalist fiction:

> It's the end of the old governmental and clerical world, of militarism, of bureaucracy, of exploitation, of speculation, of monopolies, of privileges to which the proletariat owes its servitude and the nation its disasters . . . . The struggle between Paris and Versailles is of a kind that cannot end in illusory compromises: the outcome will be unambiguous. Victory, pursued with irrepressible energy by the National Guards, is our aim and our due. We appeal to France!

Such intransigence and extremism was everywhere evident in Paris. A group called "Education Nouvelle," whose leaders would later help school districts reform their curricula, announced a radical new agenda for the schools: "Religious or dogmatic instruction should . . . immediately and radically be suppressed . . . . Further, liturgical objects and religious images should be removed from public view. Neither prayers, nor dogma, nor anything that pertains to the individual conscience should be taught or practiced in common. Only one method should hold sway, the experimental or scientific, which is based upon the observation of facts, whatever their nature—physical, moral, intellectual."

Little newspapers multiplied as fast as cooperatives, but many big ones vanished overnight, for the Commune, despite its professed libertarianism, brooked no opposition from the bourgeois press. Freedom stopped where treason began, and treason began wherever an editor fought shy of direct democracy. First to disappear were *Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois*. On April 4, the Comité de Sureté générale made *Paris-Journal*, *Le Journal des Débats*, *Le Constitutionel*, and *La Liberté* close shop. Two weeks later, another purge silenced *La Cloche*, *Le Soir*, *Le Bien Public*, and *L'Opinion Nationale*. And on May 5, *La Petite Presse*, *Le Petit Journal*, and *Le Temps* followed their brethren to the scaffold.

Fifteen miles away, Thiers convoked his generals, one of whom later wrote that "by virtue of having studied Napoleon's campaigns, he felt qualified to have commanded them." He laid before them a plan to take Paris, and early in May, less than three months after the German bombardment of the capital had ceased, an even more thunderous bombardment began.

Everything unstable crumbled under Versailles' barrage, and the new government became frantic. A Jacobin majority threat-

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ened to arrest fellow Communards who dared oppose the formation of a Committee of Public Safety. It also brought hostages before kangaroo courts or "juries of accusation" and impotently vented its rage against symbols. In mid-May, Thiers's superb townhouse was wrecked; one day later, the Vendome Column glorifying Napoleon I was sawed down.

After *La Cloche* fell silent, Zola continued to send reports to *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* and in these daily, unsigned "Lettres de Paris" he lashed out at the Commune. For now that Versailles had become inaccessible, City Hall commanded his attention. "Terror reigns supreme," he wrote on April 19. "Individual freedom and the respect due to people's property are violated, the clergy is odiously hunted down, house searches and requisitions have become a form of government; such is the wretched, shameful truth."

Zola excoriated ideologues who staged an "abominable parody of '93," but this did not prevent him from mourning humble *pères de famille* who died in battle, or from pitying those who came back horribly disfigured. Nor did it inhibit him from denouncing the egotism of Parisian West-enders. "Our implacable enemies of yesterday are called saviors by a segment of the population," he wrote. "I have heard Parisians say: 'Since Versailles can't come to our aid right away, let us address the Prussians' . . . . Terror is a sinister advisor: it drowns patriotism in personal interest."

To escape from the great city without wearing a disguise or by some other expedient, young men needed a Prussian passport. Zola somehow obtained one early in May, when it seemed quite possible that the National Guard might draft him unless the Committee of Public Safety first took him hostage. Accompanied by his wife, he left Paris via the Gare du Nord, where trains ferried refugees to a transit camp at Saint-Denis, in occupied territory. Two days later, on May 12, he summoned his mother, who had meanwhile stood guard over the house. No sooner had the local commandant issued them safe-conducts than all three made straight for Bennecourt, a village near Giverny, where they often vacationed. They stayed there a fortnight, missing the spectacle of butchery and arson that came to be known as *la semaine sanglante*.

It began on Monday, May 22, when troops poured through five gates and swept across western Paris in pincer columns. Montmartre, with cannons unmanned, fell almost immediately, but elsewhere resistance stiffened. Some two hundred barricades rose overnight and the Versaillais fought their way eastward street by street as fires set to impede them raged out of control. The Tuileries Palace was soon ablaze, then the entire rue de Rivoli, the Ministry of Finance, the Palace of Justice, the Prefecture of Police, the three-hundred-year-old Hôtel de Ville. By Saturday, May 27, all that remained unconquered of Paris was its proletarian northeast corner, and there National Guards fought only to perish heroically. Caught between implacable Versaillais and Prussian troops bivouacked just beyond the ramparts, many Communards drew their last breath in Père-Lachaise cemetery. Those who didn't fall among the mausolea were lined up against a wall known ever since as *le mur des fédérés*, shot, and thrown into a common pit.

Fifty-six hostages taken by the Communards, including Archbishop Georges Darboy, died between May 22 and May 28, but these deaths pale in light of the carnage wrought by Versailles. When Montmartre fell, its residents paid dearly for the earlier murder of Generals Lecomte and Thomas. "The massacres that were to grow more fearsome as the week advanced now began," writes one historian. "Forty-two men, three women and four children were shot in front of the wall where Lecomte and Clément Thomas had been killed . . . . A court martial was improvised in the fatal house on the rue des Rosiers and for the rest of the week batches of prisoners were brought there to be executed. Bareheaded, they were made to kneel down before the wall until their turn came."

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At least twenty-five thousand Parisians suffered the same fate, far more than had died during the Terror of 1793-4. Corpses lay strewn behind ruined barricades, on the river banks, against walls throughout the city, and their number grew even after May 28 as people taken prisoner in battle or denounced by neighbors were brought before execution squads. A shallow grave dug in the Square Saint-Jacques overflowed with them. Blood ran down gutters there and elsewhere, coloring the Seine red.

Eager to give *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* eyewitness reports, or perhaps urged to do so by the editor, Zola came back from Bennecourt at week's end and surveyed the devastation while it still smelled of rotting flesh. "I managed to take a walk through Paris. It's atrocious," he wrote sometime before May 31.

> All I want to tell you about are the cadavers heaped high under the bridges. No, never will I forget the heartache I experienced at the sight of that frightful mound of bleeding human flesh, thrown haphazardly on the tow paths. Heads and limbs mingle in horrible dislocation. From the pile emerge convulsed faces . . . . There are dead who appear cut in two while others seem to have four legs and four arms. What a lugubrious charnel house!

More of the same awaited him in Père-Lachaise, which he visited several days later:

> This part of the cemetery is completely trampled down, as if men had engaged one another in brutal hand-to-hand combat. Here and there are pools of blood, corpses that no one has even taken the trouble to collect. I saw a child of seventeen, stretched out on a white gravestone, his arms crossed, like one of those stiff gisants the Middle Ages put to bed on sarcophagi. Nearby, a national guard had fallen on the sharp points of a gate and still hung there impaled, bent in two, horrible, like a carcass in a butcher's window. Blood had spurted over funeral wreaths and along the marble slabs there were bloody fingerprints, suggesting that some poor devil, mortally wounded, had clung to the edge before collapsing.

Every street in Paris spoke to the reality of a *bête humaine* trampling civilization underfoot. Evidence just as gruesome abounded in Versailles, where the Orangerie, the riding schools, and the stables became hell on earth for forty thousand prisoners. Crushed together, starved, and taunted by the locals, not a few ended up dashing out their brains or dying of disease before they could be court-martialed.

Such images stayed with Zola for life. But a letter written on July 4 suggests that in his yearning for business as usual, he, like many others, felt impelled to distance himself from what he had seen, or somehow to bracket the horror of it all. "I am now back in Batignolles, like someone roused from a bad dream," he informed Cézanne. "My little house is unchanged, my garden has not moved. Neither furniture nor foliage has been damaged, and I can believe that those two sieges were nasty farces, invented to scare children." The fact that his pen had not been idle, he continued, made the resumption of normal life easier. "Twice I returned to Paris with more money than I had had when I left. *La Cloche* and *Le Sémaphore* . . . fed me each in turn, and fed me well. I tell you this so that you won't lament my fate. Never have I felt so hopeful or so eager to work. Paris is reviving. As I've often said, our reign will soon begin . . . . It's a pity all the imbeciles didn't die, but I console myself with the thought that not one of us has fallen by the wayside."

La Fortune des Rougon was to appear at last, after a long postponement, and correcting page proofs quickened the fantasy that this first chapter of *Les Rougon-Macquart* would rout his pious detractors. With war now over, Zola girded himself for peace.

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Revolution by search committee

by Richard Abowitz

During the Sixties and early Seventies, public attention was briefly focused on the University of Wisconsin's Madison campus, where student protests reached levels of violence that were astonishing even for that violent time in American life. Many people concluded that the radicals had virtually taken over the campus. They were right, of course. Since then, the violence has subsided, but the radical control has not. The Left is institutionally entrenched here, and there is no better place to observe its baleful effects than in the university's English department.

Of course, all the recent trends of academic life are evident in Madison, as they are on so many campuses across the country. In the English department, a student is much more likely to read Kate Chopin than Herman Melville, if he reads American literature at all. (There is no American literature requirement for English majors, or for education majors who plan to teach English.) A walk through the library's magazine room shows the abstrusely deconstructionist *Critical Inquiry* on prominent display, along with the most recent issue of Madison's own academic quarterly, *Contemporary Literature*, featuring articles on Jacques Lacan, feminist fiction, and "post-structuralist" theory. Other crucial publications—like *Off Our Backs: A Women's News Journal* and *Challenge: The Revolutionary Communist Newspaper*—can be found in the undergraduate library in the spaces set aside for "women's studies" and "ethnic studies."

The school's literary magazine, *The Madison Review*, featuring poetry and short fiction by both students and established writers, is little better. The faculty-appointed poetry editor, a student, is a self-confessed radical who openly pedals *The Socialist Worker* on the street. As poetry editor of *The Madison Review* she has shifted the magazine's emphasis from literary to political poetry. At one time, *The Madison Review* featured original work by the likes of C. K. Williams and George Bradley. It now *reprints* the Marxist-feminist poetry of Rachel Blau DuPlessis, who maintained in a lecture here last year that reading itself was an enactment of male domination, since we read words in phallus-like straight lines. *The Madison Review* also includes the work of unknowns who aspire to her low standard: for instance, the young poet who recently contributed "Olliemania," about the strikingly unliterary subject of Oliver North.

But all this is as nothing compared to the most recent manifestation of the radical agenda: the so-called Madison Plan, which (as we shall see) affects the English department in a decisive way. The purpose of the Madison Plan is to increase minority presence at the university and, supposedly, to decrease racial tensions. The evidence of these racial "tensions" was, precisely, a Fiji (Phi Gamma Delta) fraternity party at which students made themselves up in blackface (to resemble Polynesian natives) and the

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disruption of an African studies class by some visiting Acacia fraternity members from Illinois. The idea for the Madison Plan grew out of these juvenile episodes. But it could be seen as a gross overreaction to them, too, the real purpose of which is to placate the radical elements on campus. The university says that the plan will cost 4.7 million dollars over the first three years. Among its most unsettling aspects are the addition of an ethnic studies requirement to the undergraduate curriculum and the implementation of a quota system for the hiring of minority faculty.

Both of these ideas have been the subject of controversy in the academic community outside Wisconsin. The imposing of a Third World cultural studies requirement at Stanford—as part of the revision of its core curriculum—made headlines throughout the nation, and a recent conference of the National Association of Scholars in New York served as a platform for complaints from teachers at many different schools concerning such quotas. Yet there has been virtually no criticism of the Madison Plan in Madison itself. One reason has to do with the city's extraordinarily liberal environment, which is partly an outgrowth of a long tradition of native populism in Wisconsin dating back to Robert La Follette's Progressive movement early in this century. The other reason is simpler: in such an environment, to question the means of combating "racism" is to risk being charged with the crime.

At Wisconsin, the Left is using these conditions to institute changes that even the most audacious radicals of an earlier time would not have tried. For a case in point we have only to return to the English department. As its contribution to the Madison Plan, it has voted to offer a tenured position—at a salary approaching eighty thousand dollars a year—to June Jordan, the radical black activist, political essayist, and poet.

Normally, a candidate for such a high-paying, prestigious appointment is required to give an open reading of his creative work and a lecture demonstrating his presumably impressive critical capacities. In June Jordan's case, the poetry reading was held in the summer, when most of the regular faculty was away; and the "lecture," presented this past November, was only an informal chat about a play Jordan was working on.

But it is not altogether clear whether a proper public display of June Jordan's abilities would have made any difference, at least to the university's English department, who voted overwhelmingly to offer her the job. For June Jordan hasn't exactly made a secret of her artistic mission or critical agenda. Her attitudes toward poetry and literature, toward the English language, and toward America—white America, in particular—are on record for all to see and read. What is amazing is that any reputable English department anywhere would consider her a senior person of distinction, worthy of a prestigious position and a whopping salary.

June Jordan now teaches at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. She attained some notoriety last year for writing—with Houston A. Baker, Jr.—an oddly phrased "tribute" to the novelist Toni Morrison in *The New York Times Book Review*. Morrison, according to Miss Jordan and Mr. Baker, "has insisted on the subjects of her sorrowing concern." These subjects are "black children and women and men variously not themselves, variously not yet free from an inexplicable, mad, impinging hatred that would throttle or derange all village/family/sexual love." Morrison was also said to conjure up "alternatives to such a destiny: political and skin-close means to a transcendent self-respect."

The import of this vapid piece of demagoguery was that since James Baldwin never won a major literary prize in his lifetime, Toni Morrison had better, or racism would be the proven charge. The result of course was that Morrison's Pulitzer Prize—promptly awarded three months later for her novel *Beloved*—was tainted by the not unreasonable assumption that

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political intimidation had something to do with it.

But the *Times* tribute hardly does justice to the full range of Jordan's literary concerns. For these, one must turn to her poems and essays.

June Jordan's poetry is a kind of formless, colloquial, banal verse that is constantly making political points with a heavy irony or a committed earnestness. The character in one poem, for example, intends to try suicide "so his wife and babies could qualify for welfare in the new year." In another poem, a "chorus" chants:

> "Fucken feminists turned themselves into
> bulldagger
> dykes and scared the shit out of decent
> smalltown people . . . .
>
> Now I don't even like niggers but there they
> were
> chewing into the middle of my paycheck . . . ."

In still another, a man accidentally gets too many food stamps in the mail and so sends them gratefully back to the President of the United States. This is what you might call the domestic policy side of June Jordan's oeuvre.

In the poetry-of-foreign-policy category, Jordan's offerings are fairly predictable: a "Poem for Nicaragua," a "Poem for Guatemala," a poem about Chile (before Pinochet announced elections), and, inevitably, "Apologies to All the People in Lebanon":

> yes, I did know it was the money I earned
> as a poet that paid
> for the bombs and the planes and the tanks
> that they used to massacre your family . . . .

Perhaps the poem that best sums up Jordan's poetic outlook is "Richard Wright Was Wrong." In this poem, Jordan basically makes the case that Bigger Thomas, the murderer-protagonist in Wright's *Native Son*, was really "a whiteman":

> yes he was
> the one does it to you
> did it to Fatima Ghazzawi
> 17 year old Palestinian whose leg
> the real Bigger Thomas blew into infinity
> he's the one teaching his children to kill
> for the Klan . . . .
>
> he does it to you
> he's a whiteman
> he's the Grand Duke Dragon of the Ku Klux
> Klan
> he rules Chicago
> he over-rules New York . . . .

Such sentiments are everywhere evident in Jordan's poetry, but not only there. Indeed, they are given their most extreme expression in her essays. (These are collected in two volumes, *Civil Wars* [1981] and *On Call* [1985].) In an essay from 1975—originally a speech delivered at Yale to argue against the geneticist William Shockley's right to speak on campus—Jordan wrote, incredibly, that American blacks were facing destruction:

> Right now, in America, we, Black people, Third World peoples, poor people, in general, are being sterilized: homogenized into nonexistence, sterilized . . . . now, and right here, the poor and the Black and the Third World peoples here, at Yale, must testify to repeated and growing prospects of private and state-supported policies to destroy and extirpate "us" from this diseased body politic of these United States.

She tells us elsewhere that the United States acts as the world's "most powerful ally of counterrevolutionary, inhumane, and barbarous regimes" and represents "the greatest evil to peoples seeking just rights of self-determination."

Other countries, as you might imagine, are not so diseased or evil as the United States. Nicaragua, for instance. In an essay replete with the kind of radical rhetoric that must surely impress an English department's search committee, Jordan explains

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why she had to go to Nicaragua in 1984:

> All my life I've been studying revolution. I've been looking for it, pushing at the possibilities and waiting for that moment when there's no more room for rhetoric, for research, or for reason . . . . Here in the United States you do get weary, after a while.

But in Nicaragua, the wait is over. The "kids" who led the revolution, she tells us, even passed a law "prohibiting the exploitation of women in any and all advertising"! And on top of that, "many of the revolutionaries of Nicaragua were poets."

So she had to go there, she tells us, and she does, and—in classic political pilgrimage style—she is ecstatic at what she finds. "How easily the people laugh." With their "bodies and their blood they have shown us the bravery that self-love requires." She sees women working alongside men, confident they will get equal pay. She is impressed by the "notorious energy" of the Sandinistas, and, of course, she is pained by the enemies of this "truly progressive First World revolution." How many of these "gentle people have I killed just by paying my taxes?" she asks. And naturally she wonders when black Americans will "emulate the spirit of the visions of the Sandinistas."

But Nicaragua doesn't stand alone. Looking back on the Seventies in another essay, Jordan happily names to herself "those nation states and their peoples who seek to achieve actual political sovereignty": Vietnam, the People's Republic of Angola, and Iran, among others. You would think that the mixed, not to say appalling, results of such seeking after "sovereignty" would give her pause—but no. "Long ago, in my lifetime," she remarks, "the only miracle was Cuba, against the U.S.A. Now check out the map!"

In the same essay, entitled "Beyond Apocalypse Now" (1980), Jordan reveals in passing the nature of her literary sensibility. Of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* one of the major literary masterpieces of this century, she writes: "I have always despised this story as a preeminent contrivance of racist mythology." In another essay, T. S. Eliot is sarcastically referred to as "that consummate Anglophile whose name I can never remember." In another, on Walt Whitman, Jordan begins with this interesting literary observation:

> In America, the father is white; it is he who inaugurated the experiment of this republic. It is he who sailed his way into slave ownership and who availed himself of my mother—that African woman whose function was miserable—defined by his desirings, or his rage.

These words are actually a prelude to praise for Whitman, who somehow escapes the turpitude Jordan finds in so many white poets—and not just the famous ones. In another essay, Jordan describes her experience as a judge for a poetry contest in Minnesota. As she reads poems from the young "white poets," she notices that not one of them has dealt with police murder, Eleanor Bumpurs, the Bernhard Goetz shooting of four young blacks, or apartheid. Yet, she proudly announces, she won't deny white poets their themes; in return, she doesn't want black themes stigmatized as political or crude. Apparently what really constitutes a poem for Jordan is not the imagination of the poet but rather the politics of race.

And make no mistake, the politics of race, for her, are extreme, dogmatic, and irreconcilable: there is a white world and there is a black world. Except in the person of William Kunstler—to whom she addresses a fulsome tribute—the two worlds rarely meet. They are unbridgeable by any transcendent idea of art. And they don't speak the same language.

One of the scariest of Jordan's essays is called "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan." It starts out with an explication and defense of the rules of black English. ("Rule 2: If it's wrong in Standard English it's probably right in Black English . . . . Rule 4: Forget

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about spelling. Let the syntax carry you.") She admits that for many students her course on black English was not easy. "Learning Black English," she writes, "required a fallback to patterns and rhythms of speech that many of their parents had beaten out of them."

It is very odd to think of an English teacher expressing such sentiments at a time when students are graduating from college with an increasingly feeble command of the English language. To encourage students to ignore spelling and violate grammatical rules—this, apparently, is part of June Jordan's mission as a teacher of English. Yet she doesn't stop there.

The essay quickly switches from a defense of black English to a political tract about the killing of a young black man by police officers. The facts of the case, as given, are contradictory and second-hand. The police claim the man seized an officer's gun; Jordan concludes, however, that Brooklyn police murdered the twenty-five-year-old man.

Jordan recounts how she took her class away from the study of black English and tried to get them to help organize against this horrible "execution." Her students write a letter and send it to local newspapers, but even *The Village Voice* won't print it. ("Us appall, fed up, because that another senseless death that occur in our community . . . .") Jordan defends the wording of the class's letter in her typical scholarly way: "Should we use the language of the killers—Standard English—in order to make our ideas acceptable to those controlling the killers?"

The saga doesn't quite end there, however. Despite New York City's general indifference to the outrage of Jordan and her students, a young black police officer comes to her class to defend his fellow officers. To no avail. "That morning," Jordan writes, "Office Charles had the good fortune to escape without being boiled alive . . . . I remember the pride of his smile when I read about the fate of black policemen and other collaborators in South Africa." There are many offensive implications in this passage: not least is that June Jordan seems to feel that the murder of a black New York City policeman is justifiable, as justifiable as she believes the killing of apartheid's servants to be. That a state government would pay June Jordan to teach this sort of thing is almost inconceivable. Yet New York is currently doing just that, and Wisconsin is considering it.

There is every reason to assume, incidentally, that June Jordan will be teaching similar classes at Wisconsin. "I am inclined to do what I can," the department chairman wrote in a memo on Jordan, "in making June an offer as to course choice which she will find enticing." (With a prose style like that from the chairman of the English department, perhaps we should not expect too much.) What Jordan finds enticing is definitely *not* the standard curriculum. The "system," she writes in her essay on Whitman, is "responsible for every boring, inaccessible, irrelevant, derivative and pretentious poem that is glued to the marrow of required readings in American classrooms." Like the state, which "seeks to conceal the truth from us, the people," the academic curriculum has "omitted the truth of [black women's] difficult lives."

The most bizarre aspect of the offer to June Jordan is that it works against the stated goals of the Madison Plan. For the amount of money June Jordan is being offered, three young black professors could be hired—even professors with the requisite academic credentials, which Jordan so conspicuously lacks. This would seem a more effective way of increasing minority presence on campus—though still the wrong way. As for decreasing tension between ethnic groups, June Jordan's arrival would be more likely to do the opposite.

The worst conflict between ethnic groups on the Madison campus has been between Jewish and black students. The Jewish community was infuriated when the Black Student Union tried to use university money to bring Louis Farrakhan to campus last year. (They failed, but have just tried again this year—and succeeded.) Black students were

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equally upset by a tasteless skit—involving the "bartering" of "slaves"—performed by a predominantly Jewish fraternity after the Madison Plan was announced.

Into this strife steps June Jordan, who has written of the early twentieth-century Jewish family: "that any Jewish woman became anything more than the abused servant of her father or her husband is really an improbable piece of news." She applies her talent for gross distortion to Middle East politics as well. Israel, in her view, is the "tool of the United States in [its] deadly insistence on global domination." Clearly, June Jordan's appearance on the Madison campus can be expected to create exactly the kind of racial strife that the so-called Madison Plan was designed to combat.

So what lessons are to be drawn from the June Jordan fiasco? Foremost, perhaps, is the clear warning it offers to the students at all schools: when the demagogues of the Left talk about ethnic studies and minority recruitment—when they talk about improving race relations by means of quotas and required classes—they mean to return, by institutional fiat, to the pernicious radical agenda of the Sixties. There is simply no mistaking the University of Wisconsin's wholesale capitulation to the imperatives of this agenda: the attempt to hire June Jordan has everything to do with radical politics and nothing whatever to do with scholarship, critical intelligence, acceptable standards of prose writing, or even minimal levels of artistic achievement.

If what June Jordan has written or said in the past fifteen years is any guide, her courses at the University of Wisconsin would do nothing more than propagate the crudest forms of social, political, and economic prejudice. And yet, aside from one abstention, the English faculty voted unanimously to make her an offer. Thus, almost twenty years since the bloody bombing of Madison's Army Math Research Center, when the campus and its militant students were in the news, the revolution goes on—quietly, this time. The adage has never been so true: old radicals never die, they just get tenure.

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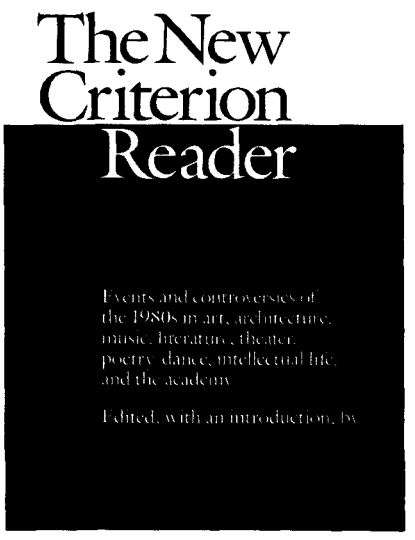
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Poems *by Bibhu Padhi, Wyatt Prunty & Eric Pankey*

Migratory cranes near Lake Chilka

for Robert Penn Warren

From this point on the road
that cuts across mountain forests,
the lake is shining and quiet,
its nearer borders a ring of foaming surf.
The fugitive birds are already here—
tenants of the warm sky and thick clusters
of rocky hills that the islands hold.
They've left winter behind four thousand miles
of land and sea, in the gathering snow.
They find their home here, in the vast expanse
of salt water that remains the same throughout the year.
Summer has just ended, but its warmth
still lingers in the clear mountain air.
The birds fly over the lake, around
its several islands scattered up to
the Bay of Bengal, dip into its depths
and flick the water off their shimmering wings and rise,
their broad bodies carrying the refracted sun
all about the territory that the eye beholds.

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They are getting their first touch of sea water
which waits for them this time every year
in a soft welcoming gesture. From here
it all seems so near, like a framed picture
that shall never leave the gaze of
the attentive eye, sharing in what the eye desires.
The birds are once again here.
Seven months later, in April, haunted by
the nostalgia of yet another summer,
they shall return to the wide plains of Siberia.
From this point on the road that cuts through
mountain forests, I can only stand and watch
their long north-western flight, in huge flocks.
The eye would turn back and find only the framed picture
hanging blank on the wall of another summer.

—*Bibhu Padhi*

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The bed

The first one lasted thirteen years
And helped them get two children;
It sagged and angled gravity
And rolled the two of them together,
Peacefully fallen in their sleep
Where curling the same way every night
They shared his snoring, her chilly feet.
Now at forty, they buy another
And figure one more after that.
Two more rounds of breaking in and down,
At first the favored sag and then
The deep canal of their linked sleep
Deepening farther every year they keep
To the same old wager, he from his side,
She from hers, the mattress not so wide
Now but serviceable, as they reckon
Under the current spread, three score and ten.

—*Wyatt Prunty*

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Homage

What prepares each day for the light that equals day?

The salt encrusted pilings, the tideline, the sure, measurable distance
between here and there

And whatever else might enter the catalog of this

Disquieting ordinariness of morning.

A pot of geraniums is set on the sill. A bit of rust shows on the lip of
a blue enameled washbasin.

The salt creek at high tide is backed up with its brine.

It turns from black to green to russet

As the sun moves through its stations, its slow, tolerant procession.

—*Eric Pankey*

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After the burial

The lank leaves offer her a little shade,
But still she hates the dust of the clay road
And noon's bright clang on the cannery roof.
The revivalists have set up a tent.
All day it's glowed with a yellow fever.
For her, the rifted hardpan stands hard proof
Of this world that the body must endure.
The soul, too, like money must finally be spent.

—*Eric Pankey*

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Music

Karajan: the last time?

by Samuel Lipman

For great conductors—at least for those who make it that far—their ninth decade is often their most magnificent; it is also, alas, their last in which to perform. Toscanini, Monteux, Walter, Stokowski, Böhm: whatever their differences, these legendary conductors share the bittersweet distinction of attaining the heights of their careers at the very ends of their lives.

Now, at eighty-one, Herbert von Karajan is entering this rewarding and treacherous decade. By all odds the most important conductor to emerge on the international scene since World War II, Karajan is the last of an all but vanished breed, that of the *Generalmusikdirektor*: master at one and the same time of orchestral and operatic conducting and musical administration, discoverer and promoter of new talent, captain of musical industry, platform idol, and final arbiter of musical taste. There have been few indeed of this breed; of these few, only Karajan has managed to be a veritable Weberian ideal-type of the species, the *ne plus ultra* of everything a conductor can aspire to in the modern world.[1]

This past winter the Vienna Philharmonic, the great orchestra with which Karajan has been closely associated, in concert and opera and on recordings, since the late 1940s, made an American tour.[2] Despite a long history of serious injury and illness and what we are told is now a life of constant pain, Karajan came here with them. At the end of February, the orchestra and the famous conductor arrived in New York for two programs in Carnegie Hall. On the first program was the Schubert Eighth Symphony (the "Unfinished") and a group of waltzes and polkas by the two Strauss brothers, Josef and Johann II; on the second was Bruckner's Eighth Symphony.

I attended the first program. Even before the concert began, the occasion was special: unlike our American orchestras' wretched habit of tuning and tootling onstage for what seems like hours before the music starts, the Vienna Philharmonic walks out in a body and begins to play with a minimum of preliminary noise. But something still more extraordinary was to come. I had known for a long time about Karajan's physical debilities, which have caused him to

1 I have written twice before on Karajan in *The New Criterion*: "The Berlin Philharmonic on Two Coasts" (January, 1983) and "Zeroing in on Karajan" (October, 1986).

2 Some six years ago, as part of the celebration of Karajan's seventy-fifth birthday, EMI issued three LP sets containing his early recordings with, in chronological order, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Philharmonia (London), and the Berlin Philharmonic. The Vienna volume (1C 137-54 3070/3), containing extraordinary performances of music by, among others, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Richard Strauss, is of great interest to those concerned with developments in musical execution immediately following World War II.

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cancel many appearances; I had also read about his continuing difficulties with the Berlin Philharmonic, the orchestra of which he is music director for life but which has grown increasingly restless under his autocratic sway. But I was unprepared for the shock I felt when a gray creature, wizened and lamed, appeared at the side of the stage, leaning for what seemed like life itself on the arm of a young and tall companion. The great conductor thus accompanied made his way, at once dragging and hurtling, to the podium, effortfully climbed on it, sat down with his back to the audience on the specially built-in bench, and with no flourishes at all began the Schubert.

The result was the culmination of Karajan's lifetime quest to achieve music through the refinement and clarification of orchestral sound. As he now conducted this thrice-familiar Schubert symphony, it did not begin; it suddenly *was*. The whispered opening phrase in the cellos and double basses, never so whispered before, seemed (like the opening sustained low E-flat of Wagner's opera *Das Rheingold*) an antecedent state of affairs, not a musical phenomenon but a fact of physical reality. And with these few notes, the mood for the entire symphony was set. The conductor's legs and feet, of necessity I was afraid, were perfectly still; his arms moved in flowing and graceful motions perfectly paralleling the sounds coming out of the orchestra.

These sounds were wholly passionless, without sudden attack or evident release, with everything bathed in what can only be called rapt refinement. All the notes were clear, but there was no brilliance; even the big chords, loud and forceful in every other performance of the piece, were here disembodied, as if conductor and players, composer and composition, had all gone beyond our earthly life. There was no thought here of the mortal Schubert or even of the immortal Schubert, of a Viennese Schubert style or of any other Schubert style; instead there was only a suggestion of what a pure music might be.

The strain on the orchestra in this kind of disembodied performance surely must have been immense. It seemed to me that the strain told in some momentary lapses in intonation in the solo winds and in some tentative string playing; even a great orchestra cannot be comfortable playing a long symphonic work without once digging into the sounds it is producing. But no matter: the perfection of Karajan's "Unfinished" Symphony was not one of performance but of *idea*. What was heard in Carnegie Hall on this cold Saturday evening was (at least for me) a transcendent musical conception—and execution—of a masterpiece, a conception of such personal delicacy and restraint, such accumulated wisdom and maturity, that it has never been heard before and perhaps will never be heard again.

The contribution of the brothers Strauss which followed the intermission changed the mood completely. Here, with Josef Strauss's *Sphären-Klange* and *Delirien* waltzes, and Johann Strauss's *Zigeuner-Baron* Overture, *Annen-Polka*, *Perpetuum mobile*, and *Kaiser-Walzer*, Karajan exchanged his role of messenger-from-the-hereafter for that of an entertainer playing to his public. Priggish as it may be to say so, I must admit that I did not enjoy the conductor's return to the here and now. In this less-than-profound music, I felt the presence of Karajan's infirmities, and I found myself thinking back on just how many times, in blossoming health and in the fullness of youth, he had brought to these works the glitter and vitality which alone can make them great art.[3] What had seemed ethereal in the Schubert was now, in the music of the Strausses, flat; what had earlier seemed revelation was now mere lethargy.

When the audience, which had been bewildered at the end of the Schubert (these days New York audiences are hardly used to

3 Karajan's recordings of the *Perpetuum mobile* (1948) and the *Delirien* waltz (1949), both properly brimming with vitality, are contained in the EMI Vienna set I mentioned above.

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being on the receiving end of revelations), cheered lustily after the waltzes and polkas, Karajan rewarded them with an encore—the *Radetzky* March of Johann Strauss the elder. Now the audience really had a great time clapping with the beats, and matters only got more boisterous when the conductor turned to them and gave a half-smiling, half-mocking cue for the final round of claps.

How are we to understand the metamorphosis that took place in this concert, this descent (or so it seemed to me) from the sublime to the faintly ridiculous? Several thousand people were privileged to witness an unforgettable moment in musical history—the manifestation of a great musician's highest vision at the very end of his career; then, a few minutes later, the very same audience—and the very same great musician, along with his collaborators—happily joined in what can only be called a clap-along. How, I repeat, are we to understand this?

The answer is simple. Musical performance, like every other kind of performance, means pleasing an audience. Performers—even, or perhaps especially, the greatest—live to give pleasure to an audience; the more the pleasure, and the larger the audience, the better. In this pleasure is the audience's satisfaction; in this satisfaction, indeed, is the performer's pleasure. That there is the capacity, in the very greatest musical performers, to convey an insight into matters beyond mere pleasure and satisfaction, into the ultimate nature of art and perhaps even of life, is something extra, and miraculous. That the glorious talent of Herbert von Karajan was able to convey, through the medium of his pain-wracked body, this insight in the Schubert symphony was more than we have a right to expect; that he shortly thereafter reverted to the entertainer he has always prided himself on being—well, that's just life. *Carpe diem*, and all that.

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Art

Sienese storytellers

by Creighton Gilbert

The Metropolitan Museum's show of Sienese fifteenth-century painting was an apparently unexpected triumph, on several levels if not all, for its artists and its installers.[1] Tickets were not required to enter, unlike the case of the simultaneous O'Keeffe show in the building, yet the Sienese banner hung in the middle of the façade and O'Keeffe's went to one side. There were reports in the holiday period of crowds thick enough to make the air unpleasant. If the people who have to guess what attendance will be had assumed a bigger draw for a show that was modern, American, and maybe feminist, thus requiring no work or background by the drop-in public, than for a display of mostly very small religious pictures, with obscure stories, from a secondary and now obsolete locus of European culture, they would have been as reasonable as conventional, yet some re-estimating may now occur. The museum did at least give the show a good send-off, unlike the nearly hidden one of Giovanni Pisano a year earlier. The difference had some connection, no doubt, with the active wish to do this show by the department of paintings, which manages far more of the museum's well-attended shows than any other. It became one of the exhibitions "everybody" has seen, making an almost comic polarity with the just preceding status of the same kind of art; it is easy to imagine the inertial resistance to the unfashionable that would have met exhortations by specialists a year ago to go and look at such things. One can even expect some of the new awareness to be retained.

The contrast with a year ago has the extra point that this art was there for the looking in the building all the time. Of the one hundred forty items in the show (by the broadest of several ways of counting) no less than twenty-nine were the Met's own, commendably moved to the temporary gallery for comparison (again unlike its Giovanni Pisanos). If one bracketed these with similar works from other towns, the permanent display would even match the show in quantity. We thus get a focused test for the debate on whether loan exhibitions of unique fragile works are proper. Is it true that people will only come when it's a special show? Could one use Senator Aiken's model for solving the Vietnam policy argument, and simply declare the museum's permanent early Italian galleries to be a special show? If attendance does rise in the show, is it a counter-argument that the permanent galleries are often as full as they comfortably should be, with people likelier to have a more than surface interest, or that the costs of the show, in more ways than money, may outmatch the additional ticket sales? Or is

1 "Painting in Renaissance Siena, 1420-1500" was on view at the Metropolitan Museum in New York from December 20, 1988 to March 19, 1989. The catalogue, by Keith Christiansen, Laurence B. Kanter, and Carl Brandon Strehlke, is distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. ($45 hardbound; $29.50 paper).

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there a real gain from the show in the fraction of visitors who do come upon a revelation?

The energies given to it notably differed from the permanent galleries with respect to its really spectacular installation. The success must be credited in good part to the museum's installer, Michael Battista, and in particular to its lighting designer. The latter, Steven Hefferan, seems not to be among the dozens of people, almost all members of the art historical hierarchies of various institutions, from directors to interns, whom the catalogue thanks for making it possible. When the visitor enters no pictures are immediately before him, but he will be drawn to a lot of bright little objects a little to the side, most of them inside plexiglass (or similar) boxes, as many as six little paintings to a box. The spotlights beamed at the paintings hit the plexiglass with a resulting scattering of sparkles, a theatrical kind of arrow-pointing. It may not even have been the intent, and does not seem a cheap pitch, for one registers it as functional museum lighting, with a happy extra spin that is totally effective. The brightness of the little pictures—commonly about ten by fifteen inches—is authentic, for this was an art executed virtually without shadows. Figure modeling was important, but it used a color range from whitened highlights to a full undiluted pigment for the "dark" side of a form. All this slots the visitor in the role of a viewer as of jewels in a store, small, valuable, brilliant, and exciting objects behind their glass. He is also conditioned to come close, and take a long slow look, an agreeable difference from the usual dynamic in which the viewer doesn't stop walking from room to room until he has, in the all too accurate phrase, "seen the museum." The slowness depends on the storytelling contents of the major part of the works exhibited; the public is now shifted to the pattern more common in the viewer of a movie or television drama, one in which our culture does call for sitting still long enough to get the plot straight. The slowness of looking is in turn the basis of the crowdedness. This can gratify the specialist since it is historically appropriate. These images in their original culture did not compete to grab instant attention from the gallery walker or magazine page-turner, but could expect a monopoly of attention in places where people were staying put, as in a church or palace reception room, and could thus build up the sort of strong recall we know in pictures we stare at, for lack of other foci, in a schoolroom or dentist's office. And their style incorporated that factor.

The "pastel colors" (as I heard pleased visitors call them), and the quaint stories illustrated, most familiarly comparable for us to folk tales known from children's books, also belong for our culture to Christmas (another association I heard made); indeed this art, during its recent decades of lesser popularity, has maintained a thin survival on Christmas cards, not at all inappropriately. More urbane viewers, veterans of big loan shows, were probably more inclined to meet this art halfway than they might have been a few years ago as a result of the validation that postmodernism has given to figure painting generally, and in particular to illustration and to the "academic," taboo in the age of modernism. The fashions for Hockney and Chia, even the revival of Benton and the rise in status of photographers like Winogrand, have certainly for some prepared goodwill toward what would otherwise have seemed a dusty old museum art.

Within the vast ranges of figurative painting in the West, there had been for this small sub-group of fifteenth-century Siena—forgotten when its artists died, in the usual way—one major previous revival. This was in the late Victorian age, when a special cachet inhered in an art that was historicist and aestheticizing too. The pre-Raphaelites, rightly famous for reviving Botticelli, loved what they thought was naïve and pure in old art even more if its primitiveness was free of toughness or "barbarism." A late primitivism, a bit sweet, was just right, and in 1903 Bernard Berenson exemplified this in what

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is still the most famous commentary on Sassetta, the hero of this exhibition, defining him as a "mystic" conveyor of religious revelation. The fourteenth-century pioneers of Sienese painting, from Duccio on, had been more complex, with a vigor in their graceful choreography not so frequent in this later age. The little town, in general decline, seems mirrored in these elegant and deft practitioners, repeating earlier formulas a lot, as the catalogue and other studies rightly notice. Their most obvious revision was in being willing, to a mild degree, to use the outside modernisms of their great contemporaries in Florence like Donatello, the real Renaissance inventors, and thus to allow a flavor of this-worldly structure to buttress the still fundamental medieval premises of their native vocabulary. As the catalogue implies, they are defined by their influences. Incidentally, this has also made them the ideal subjects for the art historical method called connoisseurship, where the central aim of defining each work by comparison with others depends heavily on the reference to the earlier images it modifies. An artist such as Donatello, like Shakespeare, is only embraced in part by that system, so dominant in the generation of Berenson, but these artists, whom one might like to parallel with someone like Herrick, may even have seen attention diminish as most art historians became more interested in other approaches.

The special stimulus to this exhibition (proudly noted as the first big one since one in 1904, which included the fourteenth century too) shows with special clarity a force in the choosing of topics of shows that is as important as it is little articulated. That is the intense concern by the choosers with the prime role in their audience of other museum officials; it is more often noticed in actors and in poets. The catalogue opens by saying the show responded to two "desires"; one is the (invariable and automatic) "revaluation of the school," but the other is "to honor John Pope-Hennessy." The senior among the three curators of the show tells us that he had worked with Pope-Hennessy for ten years, and that the other two had been his "pupils." (Since they did standard Ph.D study at places where Pope-Hennessy was not, that does seem to leave their official thesis supervisors and other teachers there in a slightly undignified role.) Not only does the catalogue have a dedication to Pope-Hennessy on his seventy-fifth birthday, but the page has a Christmas-cardy logo of (thirteen!) candles. It seems an unprecedented expression of personal intimacy in the sober context of learned analyses, of a kind more familiar in gala tributes to stage veterans. The museum had already given its retired curator a perhaps unique sort of apotheosis, issuing a fine-press hard-bound pamphlet consisting of a bibliography of his writings, and arranging an endowment named for him to be attached to the title of all his successors. The process was underway already in 1977 when he came to New York with two posts, like an orchestra conductor, leaving the directorship of the British Museum after only two years or so and carrying the knighthood that goes with that kind of position in Britain.

Pope-Hennessy's connection, in turn, to the earlier era when this art was fashionable is that of a living bridge. In 1937 when he was twenty-three (as is always registered) he brought out his first book, a monograph on Giovanni di Paolo, the painter by whom there are more works in this show than by any other; two years later his second was on Sassetta. He then over the next decade moved away from the subject, and did almost nothing with it again until very recently. These early books recorded their own homage to his seniors. The first begins its preface by saying: "I have had one supreme advantage, the friendship and advice of Mr. F. Mason Perkins." The second gives this prime role to another mentor, but its close second again to Perkins, "who has perhaps a more intimate knowledge of, and a greater intuitive sympathy for, Sassetta's style than any other living critic." Perkins was a kind of moon of Bernard Berenson; nine years younger, also from Boston, settling in Italy

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to collect, write, and collaborate with dealers, he even married Mrs. Berenson's former secretary. Lacking Berenson's confidently wide range, he studied almost only Sienese painting and issued no large books, but a long series of very short articles. These were mainly printed locally, in the little magazines of learned bodies published by town archivists. As Pope-Hennessy's tribute implies, and as I can attest myself, he was warm to serious young visitors, a lot kinder than Berenson. Pope-Hennessy's two prefaces thank twenty or more other people too, but not Berenson, whose absence from the list is made noticeable by the acknowledgment to *Mrs.* Berenson's "beneficent interest" in the young man. Later, however, Pope-Hennessy had a different view of his early indebtedness. In 1968 Perkins is remembered rather neutrally, for having furnished entree to Sienese specialists, and another scholar is given more credit for having "instilled in" him a "concern with attributions," but the climactic top credit now goes to Berenson. By 1987, defending Berenson in *The New York Review of Books* against an attack claiming he had acted corruptly with dealers, Pope-Hennessy defines Perkins as no creditor of his at all, but describes him as a "mere attributor of pictures," a "timid, parsimonious man with a strain of suppressed violence," an arranger of sales of Sienese pictures to New Yorkers, some of them fakes, himself the owner of a collection he could not sell. This has distressed the notable Italian specialist Federigo Zeri, whose publications, unanimously endorsed by others, incidentally have provided this show with its three most outstanding "firsts": an unknown small part of Sassetta's chief work, the one that was the theme of Berenson's 1903 essay; a Sassetta here shown publicly for the first time outside Australia, a key unit of his first narrative cycle; and the joining of two works by the later artist Francesco di Giorgio, in the Met and in the National Gallery, Washington, as sawn-apart fragments of one painting. Zeri wrote with some vehemence that this "wish to privilege a demolisher's stance, to favor the total diminution of him as a person" could not be justified.[2]

Well, we all change our minds and do not say so, most perhaps as to having been given basic help, and perhaps Pope-Hennessy is better than most in being public about it. He has also had many changes of mind in his own—quite major—activity as an attributor of pictures, and has been frank about that too. Here, to be sure, he had to be, since the system of citations would have led his colleagues to record it soon if he had not. A striking case concerns one of the most visible displays in this show, a series of eight stories of the life of Anthony the Abbot. They were called Sassetta's by all specialists until, in the 1940s, some hypothesized an unrecorded contemporary of his whom they have referred to as the Osservanza Master. In 1956, in an article called "Re-Thinking Sassetta," Pope-Hennessy still said scenes 1, 4, 6, and 7 were by him, that he designed the architectural parts of 2 and 8, and that an assistant did all of 3 and 5; he allotted nothing to the Osservanza Master. In 1987, however, he assigned that master 3, 4, and 8, giving the other five to a close associate of Sassetta's, nothing to him personally. To be sure, Pope-Hennessy's standing, unlike those of Zeri, Perkins, and Berenson, never has been based on success with attribution, i.e., new proposals to attach names to pictures that then gained consensus. He has done a lot of them, but the consensus about them has not been strong; here again he has been good in being clear about it.[2]

He has much more of a role in this show than as its ideal viewer. The very many citations to him in the catalogue substitute, in effect, for those by the curators, who have

[2] The same diametric change from acknowledgment in 1937 to castigation in 1987 was applied to another connoisseur of the Berenson-Perkins generation, Langston Douglas, except that the original honor to Douglas had been less. Douglas's son protested in a letter to *The New York Review of Books*, quoting also part of the shifting remarks on Perkins. Pope-Hennessy responded that he retained his new opinion, but did so with courteous restraint.

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not indeed offered much of any study of this art in print, where it would have been subject to the kind of peer review mentioned (and which they apply, properly, to the work of others). The mentor thus functions to give an authoritative reference point for the seriousness of the show and the rightness of its views. The major work of one of the three curators is a 1985 thesis, not yet published, on one of these Sienese painters, Domenico di Bartolo, who however has a quite small place in the show. A second of the group, I understand, is now finishing his on the visit by the outside painter Signorelli to Siena near the end of the time span of the exhibition, while the third is the author of a well-regarded book of 1982, worked up from his thesis of five years earlier, on another outside visiting painter, Gentile da Fabriano, whose local impact is agreed on as secondary. All the curators could thus naturally feel that they were at home here, but the effects of their particular knowledge on the show seem oddly centrifugal. Domenico di Bartolo's slight role in it is the natural effect of the sparseness of his surviving work. That also happens to have the effect that none of those shown shares its emphasis on narrative (as the museum director correctly noticed, the show has its "focus" on narrative) and one of them is of enormous scale, a group of fresco fragments that by far exceeds anything else here in size. It is rightly displayed at the margin of the show, and altogether Domenico's contribution does not feed in to the rest. The curator's illuminating reports on his artist, to his credit, avoid any attempt at such integration, but do leave us somewhat distracted about the general theme.

Signorelli is represented by a single small narrative out of a set; its totally Renaissance power, erasing the ambiguous archaism otherwise dominant, puts it too in the position of a digression. It was evidently meant to take care of this by showing one Sienese painting produced under the influence of his visit. This is a panel recently bought by the Metropolitan, of a quality sadly lower than the rest of the show, with attributions that have jumped about even more than most. (It seems suggestive of its quality that the artist to whom the catalogue attributes the greater part of it is not presented in the show with any other work, though the Metropolitan owns one.) A drawing on the back, the catalogue tells us, is "unmistakably related" in style to Signorelli, or, in the next sentence, is "difficult to imagine" being by any other artist, so that, in the next, its dating "within Signorelli's career" becomes our concern. Unfortunately, the show is not installed so that we can see the back (as was done in another case to show us a very slight remnant) nor is there a reproduction beside it or even in the catalogue in infrared or other form. If this lack is justified, as is plausible, by its being "only partially legible," by the same token its attribution can be only partially firm.[3]

A major reason for the rarity of the exhibition is of course the owners' reluctance to lend such works. The plexiglass look is the offshoot of the condition imposed by many that they travel in a vacuum, to avoid changes of humidity. Others, though, seem not to have imposed it—the private owners, mainly, but also the museum of Pasadena, whose relatively large picture is not so encased—and the random effect suggests that it was done only on demand. (This should allow an interesting test later as to whether the procedure is in fact beneficial; if no differences emerge in the state of the paintings, it may be relegated to the super-caution of museum officials or their a priori preference for

3 The curator's courteous offer, before the show, to show me this drawing under infrared light in a storage room is here gratefully acknowledged. But, for the same reasons that make shows like this of value to specialists to begin with, one wants to see it where it can be compared, for one's own amount of time, independently and repeatedly, for optimum results. In this case, comparison of one of the figures on the front with works installed nearby made me infer that its artist was associated with Pietro Orioli, rather than the Griselda Master as it is labeled.

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finding reasons not to lend. Or it may appear really necessary for all works.)

The pull toward lending was the "unique opportunity" to see reassembled, perhaps for the only time, parts of works long dispersed. It is a motivation that museums find attractive. Yet a viewer looking with equal attention at each of the seventy-seven items here (by the narrower count of catalogue entries) will find fifty-two of them to be singles, either independent paintings, like all three of the Domenico di Bartolos, or only one element out of a dispersed set, such as the Signorelli (of which five small-scale parts are known). Of the remaining third of the entries, the twenty-five sets of which we do see more than one part, nine come from a single lender (or the Metropolitan), involving no reassembly. Of these twenty-five, thirteen were cases in which only some but not all of the dispersed parts were loaned, giving an imperfect value to the reason for the show. This makes us then really focus on just twelve items (including five from single sources) of which we are shown all we could see. Yet it almost doesn't matter, for three or four of these were the real point. These most remarkable sets—the early one by Sassetta, the St. Anthony series, the St. Catherine series of Giovanni di Paolo—were the unanimously understood peaks, agreed on by the museum director, the enchanted crowds, and the specialists.

Yet here a subtler doubt about museum presentation and educational activity surfaces. These splendid series are actually not whole works of art, but subsets, smaller parts, almost footnotes, meant to go with larger images, usually saints looming over them. The show is a powerful inducement to re-design these works, isolating what is likely to appeal most to us. It is somewhat like a pop concert of scherzo movements out of symphonies. One can cope with this in several ways. The director writes that the "impossible" effort to show the whole of this art was never made, but we are given the narrative component as its "most remarkable aspect." "Impossible" refers to the plain fact that the big panels will be refused as loans because they can't be carried in the boxes. Does this turn necessity too far into a virtue? It seems to collide with the curator's main goal of "revaluating the achievement of the school." The role given to Domenico di Bartolo also seems to go in a different direction; it and the stated focus on narrative thus both have contingent raisons d'etre, inconsistent with each other—which is not necessarily bad.

Yet the problem of the wholes that should include big works does seem to have generated some awkward spots. The nearest thing to a display or diagram showing us such a whole, near the beginning, is one somewhat fuzzy enlarged black-and-white of an altarpiece, with big saints and little stories below, but without the little pinnacles often found at the top (of which the show has some), and including instead a different and later form of top, a wide lunette, not represented in the show. The central display of the entire installation is a single instance of a big altarpiece panel (here because the Met owns it) a Coronation of the Virgin by Giovanni di Paolo, accompanied by three little panels below which are offered as belonging to it, thus a whole work "convincingly reconstructed" by Pope-Hennessy in 1987. (In the passage cited he really only says it is "likely," though he is more positive in the Museum's Bulletin of 1988, issued with the show.) Two of the little parts certainly go together, but there are problems as to their linkage to the third and as to the linkage of any of them to the main panel. The Virgin's dress has a different embroidered pattern in the main panel and in the scene of her Assumption below (an event regarded as having preceded the Coronation by a brief interval)— and in another entry the catalogue, following standard caution, rejects a reconstruction of this kind by Zeri because of the saint's "differently colored habit." Here the marble floor and tombs, cited by Pope-Hennessy as alike, also show different colors. The middle small panel differs in height from the side ones, so that the reconstruction requires a

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hypothesis that the latter have been cut down. This is offered, but it means two non-adjacent panels would have been identically cut, and that there would have been big blank parts in their compositions, which are normally complete in their present state. This artist was repetitious, and we may well have here parts of several rather similar works. The display would have worked treating them as such. Or the proposal may still be right, but in the circumstances of the show it is needlessly vulnerable to the impression of having been favored for the show's benefit. Giving equal space to the pros and cons of the case could have avoided such an effect.

The catalogue is strikingly assured in stating some new conclusions, often without reasons given. An earlier scholar's doubts of an attribution "are groundless"; a divergent view in another case "cannot be accepted," the reason being that the attribution here "can hardly be doubted"; "there is no reason" to call a painting not Sienese although a scholar had called it Florentine; "there can be no doubt" about another attribution. Turning to dating, another picture "cannot" be of the date "commonly accepted." Since views are called impossible to hold which we also learn have been held, these statements evidently do not mean what they say. They assign irrationality to the other opinion (though offering no rationale for the one held); the unprepared reader must wonder whether this is meant to annoy, in a running polemic. No, it is more probably an old, if not very happy, trade jargon, seen here too when the curators credit each others' ideas as "verbal communications"; it is not unlike military talk happily adopting phrases like "affirmative, over and out." It originates, as Pope-Hennessy also noted in his 1987 piece referring to Berenson and dealers, in the language of expertise. Only an absolute kind of attribution was useful for a sale, so dealers demanded it; he could well have added that connoisseurs also needed it because they would otherwise lose the business to rival connoisseurs. The commercial factor is really never far beneath the surface. Berenson's "mystic" article on Sassetta, as Samuels documented, dealt with a painting he not only owned, but hoped to sell at a profit; in this show, the anonymous term "Private Collector" belongs in some cases to actual ones, but also to all works loaned by dealers, who thus are blended in. Yet neither Berenson's nor the curators' procedure is insincere. There is probably nothing wrong with the lack of offered rationale for attributions, for their bases cannot be effectively reported in words, and are really only a vote awaiting a consensus. What is more likely to be wrong, as the history of Pope-Hennessy's attributions suggests, is the assertion of certainty.

That shows even less legitimately, and without the same basis of tradition, when it is extended to statements not about attribution or the like. We are told the contract for the St. Catherine series "makes it clear that the content and form had been discussed and agreed upon," when the Latin text then quoted, with standard good procedure, actually says that is to be done later; it makes a difference as to the degree of input of the artist. A scroll inscribed on the big Domenico di Bartolo, representing the Virgin speaking to Christ, is translated: "O my sweet son, look upon this people who hasten beneath the mantle of she who is their salvation and for the love I bear grant them all good things, and above all your guidance." Besides the grammar, the meaning needs work; the least different version I could suggest as an improvement would go: "Oh my sweet son, this people ran beneath my mantle. Look fixedly, for I am their advocate and you their help, bless them all for my love, the others afterwards and first your shepherd"—the shepherd being the pope, who is shown being blessed by Christ. A scene is said to show an imitation sculpture of "the rite of baptism" over the door of a church, which could only be true if baptizers could be nude; since the painting is about St. Jerome dreaming of being scourged for preferring the classics to the

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Gospel, it is likely to show, most aptly, a pagan analogue of baptism. A scene that looks like a normal image of Christ presenting the poor to be given alms, "must" instead (contrary to the view of a leading expert) not show Christ, "as his halo is not cruciform." But the view that Christ has to have a cruciform halo is too rigid, recalling over-simple views about color symbolism. He lacks such a halo in the adjacent scene of the same set, as another visitor observed to me. The figure lacks any usual signs of being St. James, the proposal made, and is likely to be Christ after all. The catalogue speaks of "a cherubim." Though the writer doubtless knows, from general background, both the word "cherub" as a singular, and the Hebrew plural form "-im" as in kibbutzim, what may have happened here is that the words for classes of angels have been learned in a separate part of the mind, as art history. The weakness of general humanistic contextual knowledge here is certainly remote from Pope-Hennessy's educational background. It may even make us regret less another lack in the show, one of whose fine aspects is the presence of illuminated manuscripts, familiar to very few. Labels tell us that the pages are turned occasionally (a benefit to the conservation), but when this is done, no label identifying the scene being shown is given. That would be a benefit only to the public, and the general failure in museums to provide such labels, though these are the chief means of public education, is so widespread as to call for a separate genetic explanation.

In the illuminations the exhibition gratifyingly expands its scope. It regrettably contracts in other places, for instance as to secular art, thus intensifying unduly the public notion that this art is all for the church. Among very small, and thus possibly lendable, paintings, it totally omits a unique Sienese secular type, the paintings done on the covers of tax record books, sometimes by leading artists. This is not so surprising since one that the museum owns, from the fourteenth century, showing alert clerks with a complacent supervisor, is hung not among the paintings but elsewhere in the building, on a shelf with late medieval metalwork. It is classed in a different department. The museum also owns, but does not show, a secular work perhaps by the greatest Sienese artist of this era, a drawing for the city fountain by Jacopo della Quercia, reproduced in the catalogue and rightly cited as influential. Presumably it was excluded as being for a sculpture. Yet in another case the show does relax the rule, include a drawing as to which it is uncertain whether it was for a painting or sculpture, and in still another an actual sculpture. But those were apparently all right because the artists were painters. In the latter case, of the sculpture by Neroccio, it seems to have been allowed in on the reasonable ground that without it this artist was weakly represented. Consciousness of that is suggested when a list of the major artists of the city is given and excludes him, though he is normally on it.

This exhibition suffers museologically, it seems, from setting up its rules somewhat rigidly, but then bending them as is convenient, all the while giving reasons of principle for the rules and sometimes different ones for the bending. It is hard to keep up. Generally, the exhibition does better when it loosens up on its rigidities, as much of attribution as of selection. Almost in spite of the systems, the works of art come through, their voices perhaps small but evocatively beautiful.

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Donald Judd: the end of sculpture

by Eric Gibson

By now the story is familiar. The aspiring young artist, coming of age during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, determines that his art will have none of that movement's metaphysical aspirations. For him, material and process—the physical paint itself and the act of creation—will convey no larger spiritual ideas. Instead, the work of art is to mean only what can be physically perceived by the viewer. This young aspirant goes on to make his name with reductive box sculptures which quickly take their place among the emblematic statements of a particular moment in American art, the Sixties.

The artist, of course, is Donald Judd, and he has lately been the subject of a travelling retrospective exhibition which opened at the Whitney Museum in New York.[1] Judd's work isn't perfectly suited for a large exhibition. The meager visual rewards it offers make it the sort of sculpture one finds oneself more content to think about than to look at for very long. But the show proved to be far more illuminating than expected, not least for the way it afforded a perspective on what is happening in sculpture at the moment.

In an essay on Cézanne, Lawrence Gowing has observed that one could almost write a history of art by tracing the way succeeding generations of artists have *mis*interpreted the masters who influenced them. This is certainly true of Donald Judd's followers. Most of them have limited themselves to borrowing his reductiveness, his austere formal simplicity.

In fact, focusing on this aspect of Judd's work misses the deeper ambition of the artist. Judd wanted to bring art down to earth by remaking the syntax of sculpture and, by implication, of all art. (Frank Stella was engaged in a similar undertaking at about the same time with his black "pinstripe" paintings.) Whereas art was traditionally composed of numerous components balanced against one another to achieve an overall harmony that was apprehended over time, Judd wanted to make art from a single motif that could be taken in almost instantaneously. If there were multiple parts to a work, he maintained, they had to be perceived as a unity. Each part was to have as much completeness and integrity as the whole, with all meaning concentrated in the form and materials that made it up.

By achieving this aim, Judd altered the language of art and the way we "read" works of art. They were no longer something fluid and organic; rather, they consisted of a sequence of abrupt stops and starts. Looking at a work of art—one of Judd's, that is—was

1 "Donald Judd" was on view at the Whitney from October 20 to December 31, 1988. It opened at the Dallas Museum of Art on February 12 and is to remain there until April 16. A catalogue by Barbara Haskell, who served as curator for the exhibition, is available for $39.95.

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an experience akin to reading a series of philosophical propositions. At the Whitney, one felt this analogy in particular while viewing an enormous multi-part wall relief from 1986, with its rows of square boxes, open at the front and divided into logical sequences. You looked at each box to determine what the new adjustment was, only moving on when you'd "gotten" it, like a student with his geometry lessons.

Judd's ambition was, in its way, as radical as the Cubists'. Yet it was an odd one for an artist. From its earliest beginnings, art had been linked with the idea of magic, of transformation. The viewer was always expected to submit to the "willing suspension of disbelief" that Coleridge spoke of. Yet for Judd there was no transfiguration, no creation of anything larger or more evocative out of the humble materials at his disposal. As Stella said of his own work, "What you see is what you see."

It was a bold step, yet in the end one can't help feeling it has all turned out to be a little sad. It is as though Judd missed the point of being an artist. Owing to his preoccupation with asserting his own kind of "truth," Judd came remarkably close to delivering nothing at all.

Frequently the viewer of abstract art begins by feeling puzzled, slightly depressed perhaps, at the seeming inertness of the work before him; and then, in a moment of revelation, he connects with the larger idea being expressed and leaves the literal world of pigment, stone, or steel behind forever. But Judd never permits that crucial moment of imaginative liberation. Time after time he'll get you part of the way there, only to bring you down with a thud. One of the works at the Whitney was a 1975 brass box whose top had been left off, making an open volume. From a distance, one saw a deep red reflected on its inner surfaces. It was as if something hot and glowing was sitting on the bottom of the box, and the anticipation of discovering what it was drew one closer. The discovery was a disappointment, of course, for the source of this "heat" turned out to be nothing but a brightly colored sheet of plastic—the illusion of an illusion.

There's only one instance where Judd's works actually complete an action they've started, and that is in his so-called "stacks"—the floor-to-ceiling columns of equidistant, identical boxes. Although these possess many of the same contradictions that inform all of Judd's work, they have other compensations. The stacks define and charge a space between floor and ceiling. In addition, they constitute something of a paradox as sculpture goes, a monumental volume with the presence of a monolith, but not its mass. At the same time, with their columnar configuration and step-by-step ascent, they address the upright human body—rare in a Judd—in a way that evokes Brancusi's *Endless Column*.

If Judd's work is frustrating to the viewer, or seems to embody too narrow and eccentric a view of art, it nonetheless remains inescapably important, and not simply in relation to the art of the Sixties. Judd represents the end of a certain way of thinking about sculpture. With him, what one might call the plastic tradition—in which considerations of mass, space, and surface are paramount in the artist's mind as he manipulates his material—goes into eclipse. The plastic tradition is what people usually have in mind when they think of sculpture, and understandably so, for beginning with the Willendorf Venus and similar prehistoric idols, and continuing until the early part of this century, the plastic tradition *was* sculpture. Things changed in 1912, however, when Duchamp's "Readymades" made the artist's concept more important than the finished work or the process of making it, thus introducing a new definition of sculpture along with a novel type of art. Conceptual art, as it came to be known, subsequently flourished in the Sixties, and has since come to all but dominate contemporary art. For proof, one has only to tour the galleries and museums, or consider that Josef Beuys—with his autobiographical installations and eccentric performances—is generally considered to be

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the most important sculptor in recent decades, after Judd himself.

Judd was not solely responsible for this displacement of the plastic tradition, of course. But his work, minimal in every way, was so authoritative that it constricted the range of aesthetic options open to the sculptors who came after him. At the same time, it imposed itself on them as a style to be reckoned with. There was, however, very little in Judd that later sculptors could actually make use of. You couldn't, as an artist, feed off him: his aesthetic was too self-contained and renunciatory. The well wasn't so much empty as boarded over. Joel Shapiro managed to make himself an exception to this rule by changing the terms of the discussion from abstraction to the figure, but he seems now to have exhausted this possibility. A recent work by Shapiro, shown at this year's Carnegie International, consists of an expressionistically modeled bronze torso atop a metal rod, a throwback to Giacometti that does honor to neither Judd nor Giacometti.

You can see the impact Judd has had by looking at the work of a new generation of sculptors, artists only just emerging into prominence but old enough to have grown up with Judd's work. These artists—Carol Hepper, Robert Therrien, Scott Richter, and others—are real sculptors, or want to be. Uninterested in conceptual art, they are animated by the task of expressing a sense of form; they want to make objects. It's the appearance of these objects in the galleries in the last three or four years that has sparked all the talk of a "sculpture revival" in the Eighties.

But you don't have to see very much of this work before you realize that within its apparent diversity there's an underlying sameness. The forms are Minimalist at their core, but now overlaid with varied surface effects—mainly realized by "new" materials such as tree branches, beeswax, and fiberglass. These surface effects are called upon to carry the emotional burden of the work, but most of it is uninspired. The novel surfaces may momentarily distract us, but we quickly see the familiar idioms that lie beneath them.

It's easy to imagine what has happened. Here is a generation of artists who want to recover vital three-dimensional form. But to look at their work is to conclude that they are having to re-invent the whole idea. And it is because of Donald Judd that they now find themselves in this position. Having so emphatically constricted the acceptable possibilities open to anyone interested in working with three-dimensional form, and having in the process made the whole idea of sculpture seem so deceptively simple, Donald Judd has unwittingly deprived an entire generation of any real grasp of the possibilities and demands of the forming impulse in sculpture. There was painting after Stella's "pinstripes." Not so with Judd and sculpture. It's not going too far to say that, for the generation coming after him, he has, for the time being, decimated sculpture.

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Letter from London

They do it their way

by Jed Perl

The Clore Gallery, a new wing of London's Tate Gallery, is devoted to the enormous body of work that J. M. W. Turner left to the British nation. It's designed in a subdued postmodern style, a style that wouldn't have raised eyebrows fifty years ago and will probably look equally appropriate in the year 2039. Here Turner is shown complete, the later, mystically vaporized Turners that were esteemed in the 1960s together with the earlier, more conventionally picturesque Turners that returned to favor in the historically-minded 1970s. In special galleries, watercolors and drawings that can't be exposed to light for long periods of time appear in rotating exhibitions. While I was in London in January, the temporary show focused on Turner's "Second Decade: 1800-1810" and included much work done during his visits to the Continent. All in all, the Clore Gallery is a sophisticated solution to the long-felt need for a permanent home for the Turner bequest. The Turner wing is also, so far as I can see, an international anomaly. What other nation has thought to devote an entire wing of a national museum to a single artist-hero?

Viewed at the Tate Gallery in proud isolation, Turner could provide new fuel for those who are inclined to see English art in terms of a series of free-standing, essentially disconnected accomplishments. Hogarth, Stubbs, and Constable may not have separate wings at the Tate; but they, too, impress one as existing outside any historical continuum, neither defining themselves in relation to a particular view of the past nor setting out a line of development along which others can follow. There's something to what Nikolaus Pevsner, in the title of a 1955 series of lectures, called "The Englishness of English Art." But what the Englishness consists of (beyond a tradition of high-society portraiture) will probably never be succinctly defined. This is a question, in any event, on which I wouldn't presume to offer a thorough view. To my mind, being in England doesn't have the effect of clarifying English art in the way being in, say, Holland clarifies Dutch art. English light and space strike me as having a more literary than pictorial value. But of course Dutch—or French—painting is so much greater, so maybe it all just comes down to a question of quality. Pevsner believes that England missed out on the great age of easel painting, beginning in the sixteenth century, because of "the growing importance in the national character of practical sense, of reason, and also of tolerance. What English character gained of tolerance and fair play, she lost of that fanaticism or at least that intensity which alone can bring forth the very greatest in art." One thing is for sure. London's National Gallery is the only top-flight European picture collection in which the achievement of the host country, though present, is historically irrelevant.

Recent trends in art history, which empha-

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size a pluralist view of European culture and seek to destabilize or overturn the centrality of Paris, may have the effect of setting contemporary English art in a somewhat brighter light. Whatever the relative virtues of Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff, Rodrigo Moynihan, Victor Pasmore, William Tucker, and the American expatriate R. B. Kitaj, they each make their appeal to the New York audience by offering something other than business as usual. But if the appeal of English art right now has to do with its looking anti-modern or postmodern, in England the same art may impress us less as a protest against modern orthodoxies than as a continuation of the cottage industry that English art has always been. What some will call their conservatism others will call their independence; some will say the two amount to the same thing. Let me float a hypothesis: every English artist is a philosopher cultivating his own garden. The solitary gardeners include Sickert, Spencer, Bomberg, Moore, Nicholson, Hepworth; and, farther back, Constable, Bonington, Blake, Palmer.

The What-is-English-Art? debate perks happily along in the pages of London's handsome new quarterly art magazine, *Modern Painters*. Editor Peter Fuller will be known to some in the United States for a couple of attacks on the art scene that he published in *The Village Voice* a decade or so ago. At that time, his mix of Ruskinian romanticism and left-wing politics sounded fresh, even if his advocacy of certain artists (such as the American abstract painter Robert Natkin, about whom he wrote a monograph) was uninspiring. Happily, the magazine Fuller edits—issue number four, with a Hockney on the cover, was on the stands when I was in London—has a reach and an element of surprise that's challenging and genuinely new. For his writers, Fuller has turned to England's old-timers, such as Patrick Heron; to a new generation that's eager to set its own priorities; and to figures of controversy, such as Richard Wollheim, the University of California philosophy professor whose work is high-profile enough to be interesting no matter what we may ultimately decide we think of his ideas.

In *Modern Painters* you never know exactly how the writers are going to come down. Mega-shows don't necessarily get mega-praise. Heron, a respected painter as well as a critic, offers a modulated view of Gauguin. "Very few paintings by Gauguin," he says, "are completely successful." He sees the artist's life not as illuminating the oeuvre but as tending "to drag the painting up, with it, into the supreme limelight." He calls Gauguin "a great bad painter"—which is pretty good. Brian Sewell, art critic for the *Evening Standard* and *The Tatler*, gives a stern evaluation of the recent work of Rodrigo Moynihan, complaining of "a fumbling hand that can no longer tell the difference between plaster, plastic, paper, cotton wool and cloth." I think this is just; and the courage it takes to criticize a favorite son should not be underestimated—either on the writer's or the editor's part. Nor is Peter Fuller blind to the allure of the hip. Matthew Collings, former editor of the provocative magazine *Artscribe*, offers "Diary of a Celeb," a fondly picaresque account of his visits among New York's downtown avant-garde. Clearly, Fuller means to take the measure of those with whom he disagrees. Part of the fun an American has with *Modern Painters* may have to do with our general lack of familiarity with the writers and their ideas. But there's something more here. I suspect the magazine will remain stimulating. This mix of straightforward writing, critical detachment, and a vigorous engagement with the current scene is all too rare on both sides of the Atlantic.

In January the Whitechapel Gallery, a showplace for recent art with quarters in a turn-of-the-century building, was host to an exhibition of work by the sculptor Richard Deacon. The Whitechapel is a friendly meeting place, complete with bookstore and cafeteria, and when I was there on a Sunday, not the peppiest day in London, people were spending the after-

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noon—ambling through the gallery's boxy yet dramatic downstairs space, lingering over coffee, browsing in magazines.

Deacon was born in 1949. In 1987 he won the Turner Prize, awarded by the Patrons of New Art at the Tate Gallery for an outstanding contribution to British art. No stranger to the United States, he shows in New York with Marian Goodman and was one of six artists featured in a show called "A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965," which toured here in 1987. Deacon works with a variety of materials—molded wood, sheet metal, nuts and bolts—to create skeletal and curvilinear forms that recall, alternately and sometimes simultaneously, biomorphic abstraction and the products of a mildly eccentric machinist. The sculptures range from a few feet to way over life size, and call attention to themselves in a variety of ways: with metal tabs that are riveted to wood or metal supports; with glue that oozes out from between pieces of wood to make creepy, hardened forms. Each of these touches represents some thought about how materials can be put together. Construction becomes an idea—an idea advanced with rivets, glue, Phillips-head screws. Deacon has clever ideas, but none that touch us directly, visually.

Deacon's brand of biomorphism—which, depending on whether it's viewed in England or America, will recall early Nicholson or early Gorky—is yet another case of a post-conceptual artist going into crisis as he returns to the conventions of the free-standing sculpture or of the self-contained easel painting. With Deacon, *art* becomes every bit as much a mental construction as *anti-art*. His attention-getting surfaces and self-important joinings distract us from any large movement that begins to develop. This very static work isn't sculptural. Indeed, the dominance of ideas over feelings may be even more fatal for a sculptor than for a painter. Which is why, despite the much-heralded upsurge of sculptural activity in recent years, very little sculpture of any consequence is being exhibited. What is sculpture without sensuous form?

The Whitechapel has a busy schedule of events. Along with Deacon's show I saw Rob Kesseler's amusing slide presentation, a stream-of-consciousness collage of cartoon-ish drawings and crisply photographed details of the ordinary world (still-life objects, bits of scenery). A series of gallery talks called "Sightlines" provided prominent English artists with an opportunity to "give their personal views of the Richard Deacon exhibition." The Whitechapel is also interested in giving contemporary art an historical context. After the Deacon show went down, a big show of Miró, biomorphism's granddaddy, went up.

Meanwhile, Nicholas Serota, who became a well-known figure on the international circuit during his tenure as director of the Whitechapel Gallery, has replaced the retiring Alan Bowness as director of the Tate. London is increasingly being talked about as a big-league player in the international contemporary art scene. You now hear people in New York saying, "Things are starting to happen in London"—which generally means that they're adding the British capital to their itineraries.

Peter Fuller is clearly unhappy about the internationalization—read Americanization/Berlinization—of English art. He's very unhappy about Nicholas Serota. In the current issue of *Modern Painters* Fuller reminds readers of an editorial in the first issue where he "argued that Serota's experience lay in the field of temporary exhibitions, not in the management of a permanent collection; and his record of contemporary shows at the Whitechapel—including Carl Andre, Julian Schnabel, Malcolm Morley, Gilbert and George, etc.—did nothing to inspire confidence." According to Fuller, Serota wants "to turn the Tate into a 'museum of late 20th century art.'" Fuller offers snippets of an interview that Serota gave to *The Independent*, in which the Tate director "fantasized about bringing changing installations of 'volatile, unstable art'—e.g. by Richard Serra, Mario Merz and Jannis Kounellis—on to centre-stage at the

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Gallery, while Constable got shunted to the 'edge of the site.'"

Whatever Serota does or doesn't do at the Tate, the New York-Berlin axis has been a strong presence in London since 1984, when the Saatchis opened a private museum devoted to their collection. During the winter the Americans Jennifer Bartlett, Susan Rothenberg, Eric Fischl, and Elizabeth Murray were all featured there. This quartet is far from the first batch of Yankees to fill the Saatchis' enormous space; they won't be the last. It may prove impossible for English art to retain much independence. At the Riverside Studios, a visual and performing arts complex in the currently-being-gentrified suburb of Hammersmith, I saw a show of five young English artists, all of whose work was based on a careful reading of New York trends, none of whom would have raised an eyebrow in the current SoHo season. Whatever the dangers of English insularity, they've got to beat homogeneity Saatchi-style. One interesting question, to which I offer no answer, is whether the artists of Leon Kossoff's and Frank Auerbach's generation have spawned a younger generation sympathetic to their concerns. Visitors—whether to London or New York—only skim the surface.

Back in the Fifties, Nikolaus Pevsner commented that "none of the other nations of Europe has so abject an inferiority complex about its own aesthetic capabilities as England." That doesn't seem to be the case in the Eighties. With Paris out of fashion, New York overhyped, Berlin past its prime, and jaded sensibilities turning to Amsterdam, Barcelona, maybe Hong Kong—all bets are off. London could happen yet. One would like to believe that every English artist will ultimately benefit from the presence of a vital international art scene. Serota will do his damnedest to provide the "big picture." Meanwhile, Peter Fuller represents the honorable opposition. If Fuller's brand of Ruskinian romanticism doesn't strike me as offering the key to anybody's salvation, I nevertheless give him credit for standing his ground and refusing to develop a guilty conscience. He's determined to prove that in England they still do it their way.

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Dance

Black and blue on Broadway

by Eva Resnikova

Broadway is the last place you would expect to find a celebration of the classical phase of a dying dance form, especially one whose most expressive effects are miniaturist and of a rhythmic complexity that requires close attention, not just visual but aural, from the audience. But in *Black and Blue*, Claudio Segovia and Héctor Orezzoli have succeeded double-handedly in rescuing tap dancing from the show-biz novelty into which it has largely declined, revealing it as the dazzlingly virtuoso and intensely personal kinetic and acoustic expression that it is—one whose long apprenticeship, strict discipline, and reverence for tradition bestow upon it and its practitioners the moral vigor of every classical art.

Of course, classical tap never actually disappeared; it merely went out of style. Its creators and guardians, now mostly elderly men, bided their time with the same forbearance with which they had endured the Jim Crow rules of Thirties and Forties Broadway and Hollywood. They also passed their art on to a handful of acolytes. Some of these were white female postmodern dancers who were fascinated with the possibilities of classical tap as the basis for a new dance style. Music was a stumbling block, however; these dancers did not want their pieces to be exercises in nostalgia, but the music that best suited classical tap was no longer being written.

Black and Blue celebrates the original music of the jazz and swing eras as well as the dance, and it can be considered an exercise in nostalgia in the same way as performances of *Giselle*, which also use the original music and strive for a balance between the authentic and the theatrical. The rewards of watching the tap dancing in *Black and Blue* are the same: a genuine aesthetic experience in the here and now, and the pleasure and instruction of seeing the re-creation of historical style. In *Black and Blue* we have the bonus of seeing this historical style performed by some of its creators.

Black and Blue could probably not have originated on a Broadway whose season opened with *Carrie* and whose previous musical offering had been *Legs Diamond*. In fact, in the tradition of Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds of 1928*, *Black and Blue* originated in Europe (Paris rather than London). That it got to Broadway at all probably has a great deal to do with the proven track record of its directors, who were responsible in recent years for the surprise successes of *Tango Argentino* and *Flamenco Puro*.

What Segovia and Orezzoli did was to seek out some of the greatest of the surviving talents from the glory days of jazz and swing and provide a showcase in which they could perform their specialties or re-create them on a hand-picked ensemble of singers and dancers. In the case of dance, their quest assumes the status of a mission; for while the music of this era is extensively preserved in recordings, there is little film of its dancing.

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And, in any case, if a dance form is to remain alive it must be handed down personally from generation to generation.

That the directors understand this is clear from the printed program, which lists the dancing performers under three rubrics: "The Hoofers," "The Dancers," and "The Younger Generation." Like "ballerina," the term "hoofer" is often misused by the general public as a generic description, but it is properly an honorific, awarded by his peers to a performer who has created a distinctive individual style—a dancer from whom it is worth stealing steps, in the accepted practice and terminology of the trade. The venerable hoofers in *Black and Blue*—Bunny Briggs, Ralph Brown, Lon Chaney, and Jimmy Slyde—perform dances of their own devising. Also included in this fraternity is the somewhat younger Dianne Walker, for whom another renowned hoofer, Cholly Atkins (of the "class" act Atkins and Cole), has created an understated soft-shoe.

"The Dancers" are an attractive and stylish chorus of sixteen, some of whom are featured in solo spots. Finally, there is "The Younger Generation," which comprises two talented girls, Cyd Glover and Dormeshia Sumbry, and a startlingly accomplished and gifted fifteen-year-old, Savion Glover. (Having taken over the title role of *The Tap Dance Kid* a few years back, he is the only dancer in the show who has headlined on Broadway.)

In its Parisian incarnation, all the ensemble choreography of *Black and Blue* was by Henry LeTang, a familiar name on Broadway and in Hollywood (*Eubie!*, *Sophisticated Ladies*, *The Cotton Club*, *Tap*). For the New York production, the directors invited some former hoofers to create dances in their style on other performers: Cholly Atkins; Frankie Manning, who was one of the original Whitey's Lindy Hoppers from Harlem's Savoy Ballroom; and Fayard Nicholas, who with his younger brother Harold was the "flash" act known as the Nicholas Brothers, famous for dancing on staircases, doing back flips off walls, and landing from flying leaps in full splits.

The opening of *Black and Blue* is pointedly didactic, but it's handled in such a theatrical manner that the viewer doesn't realize he's being instructed. The first number, called simply "Blues," introduces the three lead singers, Ruth Brown, Linda Hopkins, and Carrie Smith, formidable ladies in both heft and vocal equipment. They enter by rising through a trapdoor onto a darkened stage while singing, their only accompaniment the pulsation of a single thudding bass note. The song is Ellas McDaniel's "I'm a Woman," a big, gutsy classic blues whose gist is that being born female means that sooner or later you're going to end up singing the blues.

The next number is "Hoofers A Capella." Downstage in front of a plain curtain are seven dancers, representing each of the three categories, and in the appropriate distribution: all four hoofers, two boys from the chorus, and the young Savion Glover. They are in their shirtsleeves, their trousers held high by suspenders; and even though they're jacketless they wear fedoras, as if participating in such a distinguished challenge dance bareheaded would be a breach of protocol. Each in turn comes forward and performs a solo in which he tries to outdo the others in technical difficulty, rhythmic complexity, and choreographic inventiveness. The competition is friendly: the others emit vocal ejaculations of appreciation and encouragement.

Now the curtain rises to reveal the band, arrayed on risers, playing "Royal Garden Blues," with individual musicians rising to take solos. Among the instruments are the rarely encountered jazz banjo and jazz violin; it's probably the first time the latter has been heard on Broadway in half a century. (Claude Williams, the fiddler, is an octogenarian.) And so we are shown, in their proper historical, and even sexual, context, the birth of the blues, the cradle of tap, and the rise of the big band.

The variety of tap expression in *Black and Blue* will come as a revelation to viewers who know this dance form only from Gower Champion's *42nd Street* and the movies of

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Fred Astaire (whose style was really an eclectic blend of tap and ballroom), enjoyable as these are on their own terms.

The diminutive Bunny Briggs, dapper in an unlikely mix of crimson velvet jacket and khaki jodhpurs, dances to Ellington's "Black and Tan Fantasy" lost in a world of his own, oblivious to the lowdown speakeasy activities—dice throwing, dirty dancing—going on around him. He comes out of his reverie momentarily in a vain attempt to get one of the chorus girls to dance with him. She's probably a third his age and regards him as if he's mad. He shrugs off her rejection and beats a dignified tapping retreat into the wings. Later in the show, Briggs's tap work in a solo to Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" is as delicate and intricate as filigree. The audience is torn: they want to applaud each new effect but fear drowning out the pitter-patter of the next one.

Jimmy Slyde's style is smooth and easy, reflecting his chosen sobriquet. His floor-caressing solo to Benny Goodman's "Stompin' at the Savoy" is full of glides and spins and rubato. Ralph Brown and Lon Chaney, attired in artfully ersatz patchwork suits, bow ties, and the requisite fedoras, spoof their advanced age and bulk in a lumbering, hilariously deadpan pas de deux to the "jungle music" beat of Ellington's "East St. Louis Toodle-oo." They mark the steps like dancers at rehearsal saving themselves for the performance—indicating, jumping without leaving the ground—as if that's all they're able to do. (We know otherwise because we've seen them in action in "Hoofers A Capella.") One of them stares off into space, forgetting that his feet are still dancing under him. When they run out of steam they chug to a halt and collapse onto each other's shoulders, propping each other up.

The four choreographers display equally distinctive styles. To Eubie Blake's lovely "Memories of You," Cholly Atkins has created an ultrasophisticated soft-shoe for Dianne Walker and two chorus boys. (Her costume, an extraordinary off-the-shoulder, thigh-high panniered construction in lacquered black and white, is utterly elegant.) It's a pleasure to watch Walker for her finesse, the studied grace of her carriage, the way she finishes off a pose by carefully placing her arms and hands.

Atkins has also created two numbers featuring solo turns by members of the chorus. "After You've Gone," one of the longest-lived of jazz standards, is introduced in a vocal by Linda Hopkins. She literally drops from sight, and the number segues to Bernard Manners, in top hat and tails, dancing with his own looming shadow. His shadow multiplies: an illusion, it turns out, for six similarly attired chorus dancers emerge from behind a scrim. Hopkins rises again to finish the song, singing to them the jocular warning: "After you've gone, you won't forget it . . . ."

To the charming "I'm Confessin' (That I Love You)," in a low-key arrangement for fiddle and guitar in the manner of Stéphane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt, Atkins has created a number for a chorus dancer of sinuous grace and beauty who goes by the name of Kyme. Segovia and Orezzoli, who are also responsible for the lighting design, paint with light on the tilted backdrop, dividing it with an asymmetrically placed curve. Upon this is thrown Kyme's skewed silhouette as she dances by herself and sings to her shadow, then draws from the wings three boys in white tie and tails. They perform a sensual yet refined soft-shoe, their shadows now doubled on either side of the screen. The boys sing to her, first in unison, then each in turn. She falls into each one's arms for a moment and chooses one to support her as she walks blindly leaning back on his arm. As the song ends she exits into the wings; they wait a beat and run after her.

Frankie Manning, an artist of considerable artistic originality and personal modesty, is restricted in his attempt at re-creating his Savoy Ballroom routines by dancers not accustomed to his death-defying style and who have an understandable fear of flying over their partners' heads. Fayard Nicholas's contribution is wonderful but regrettably

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slight, consisting of solos for three chorus boys who dance to the instrumental break in "I Want a Big Butter and Egg Man," sung with humor by Carrie Smith. Each boy performs a bit of virtuoso solo work, including the drop split and squeeze up that was a Nicholas Brothers signature.

Surprisingly, Fayard is not responsible for the dancing-on-a-staircase number performed by the three kids to Jimmie Lunceford's "Rhythm Is Our Business," though an early press release for the show confirms that it was in fact intended for him. It was entrusted instead to Henry LeTang, who has created a routine that includes eccentric knock-kneed steps on toe, a charming side-by-side seated tap, and a finale with Savion jumping off the staircase over the two girls and landing in a split. The kids, dressed in identical sparkly white satin pants and waist-length jackets, are impressive performers and totally winning. But in this and his only other solo choreography, "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," LeTang, a skilled routinier who tends toward slickness, fails to convey the individual style and personal commitment evident in Atkins's contributions and even in Fayard Nicholas's brief routine.

LeTang's other choreography is for the ensemble. "Everybody Loves My Baby" serves to introduce the chorus and makes use of crimson velvet curtains that rise and fall and divide to create niches and frames for the dancers; at one point all we see are their dancing feet. In the Act I finale, to Fats Waller's "That Rhythm Man" (which, incidentally, was originally written as the Act I finale for the 1929 *Hot Chocolates*, about which more later), the chorus dances in the traditional lines and revolving spoke formations. Male soloists perform a razzle-dazzle profusion of virtuoso steps, including back flips, a spinning multiple pirouette on one leg with the other extended, a line of travelling beaten steps, a crouching cossack-style spin, and jumps onto handstands. At the end, the proscenium lights flash as the entire company strides in place.

LeTang is also responsible for the finale of *Black and Blue*, whose concept returns to the theatrical didacticism of the opening. The three singers, in dresses with skirts of billowing white ostrich feathers, are revealed one by one singing a lively arrangement of the title song. Then Bunny Briggs and Jimmy Slyde engage in a few measures of good-natured challenge dance. The number segues into an instrumental for Henry LeTang's ensemble choreography. A panel of compartments rolls out, a dancer ensconced in each semicircular niche. Savion does a solo, then the two little girls, in miniature versions of the singers' feathered gowns. The music turns hot, and Savion dances in front of the chorus boys. Then the four hoofers come out, and Savion dances in front of them. At one point the music stops, and they dance a capella, speaking the names of the steps. The number ends with the five hoofers and the three kids in front of the chorus, and the message is clear and hopeful: that there is a little child who shall lead them.

Though the songs in *Black and Blue* date from the first three decades of this century, the directors, who are also its designers, have unified the show by giving it the look of the Twenties. Not only was this a decade of visual elegance, but it was also the golden age of the black musical, neatly demarcated at either end by a hit Broadway show. The 1921 Noble Sissle-Eubie Blake musical comedy *Shuffle Along* was responsible for bringing tap downtown. (Indeed, it made tapping choruses de rigueur on Broadway; George White had to get the girls from *Shuffle Along* to teach the ones in his *Scandals of 1921* how to tap.) The show was such a popular success that when a new night spot opened in Harlem later that year it called itself the Shuffle Inn. A couple of years later Connie Immerman took it over, and Connie's Inn became the chief competitor of the Cotton Club.

It was at Connie's that the show marking the end of this golden age originated, the 1929 Fats Waller-Andy Razaf *Hot Chocolates*, which has given us the title songs of both black revues of the 1988-89 Broadway sea-

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son, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Black and Blue*. It also gave us the latter's loose format—a stumbling block for some present-day theater reviewers—for *Hot Chocolates* was nothing more than an elaborate version of the floor show at Connie's Inn, where it had gone by the color-blind title *Hot Feet*. After *Hot Chocolates* came depression and war; *Oklahoma!* and ballet on Broadway; bebop, which you couldn't dance to; and rock 'n' roll, which you couldn't, and didn't want to, tap to.

The Twenties was also when modernism entered the popular imagination—nowhere more so than in Paris—and Segovia and Orezzoli have scattered witty modernist references throughout *Black and Blue*. Arlene Croce in *The New Yorker* writes that the hoofers' patchwork suits make them look like "Cubistic hoboes or harlequins"; John Simon in *New York* notes traces of "everything from Gustave Moreau to Odilon Redon, from Constructivism to analytical Cubism" in the sets and "more than a little Klimt and Beardsley" in the costumes. To this I would add Suprematism in Dianne Walker's costume, with its Lissitzky wedge (masquerading as a shirtfront) in Malevich white on black.

The evident thought and care that has gone into period authenticity in the costuming literally from head to toe—from the black plume on the chorus girls' top hats to the red-painted heels of their shoes—as well as the lighting and staging, is as gladdening as it is rare in today's commercial theater. All the more puzzling, then, the reactions of some of the reviewers, notably two unlikely fellow upholders of the Broadway status quo. Here is Frank Rich in the *Times*:

> *Black and Blue*. . . is a festive tribute to great black American jazz and blues artists as only a madcap pair of Argentine set and costume designers could have imagined it . . . . Mr. Segovia and Mr. Orezzoli don't seem to understand that the power of blues and jazz often rests in their unadorned simplicity . . . . Perhaps *Black and Blue* intends to dazzle us with its lavishness, but the production is lavish by Crazy Horse revue standards, not Broadway's.

And Michael Feingold in *The Village Voice*:

> Perhaps the real question of *Black and Blue* is whether some fabric shop was offering a bargain on silver lamé last week, or whether its creators, who also designed it, think their entertainment is so meager they have to blind the audience with dazzle from the word go. Glitter is a staple of the Broadway revue, but it's never been wallowed in so remorselessly as it is here.[1]

What disturbs is the air of authority with which the reviewers present themselves as experts and (wrongly) dismiss the production as a travesty. After all, it's not as if this era were undocumented. But authenticity does not seem to be the primary issue here. In his next sentence, Rich casually refers to Segovia and Orezzoli as "the entrepreneurs in question"—a designation that surely more properly belongs to the two producers of the show than to its director-designers. The use of "entrepreneurs" in this context clearly implies exploitation by Segovia and Orezzoli of black culture and performers, even though Rich assures us, "They mean well."

Rich attributes the show's failings partly to a "cultural gap," but another sort of cultural gap is at work in the critic's inability to distinguish and appreciate the real thing as opposed to the adulterated versions normally served up for Broadway consumption. He castigates the production for what he considers vulgarity and bad taste ("While bursting with talent worthy of the Cotton Club . . . *Black and Blue* looks like the bloated

1 There was evidently some dissension among the editorial ranks at the *Voice*, since next to Feingold's was printed a second opinion, by jazz critic Gary Giddins, who wrote: "I'm amused by the presumption of theater critics who complain of *too much* costume and glitz; I suspect they wouldn't have deigned to enter the Cotton Club or Latin Quarter . . . ."

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nightclub floor shows that used to flourish in decadent Latin American capitals just before dictatorships collapsed"), without stopping to consider that his idea of decorum may not be the same as that of the original purveyors of this art.[2] When Rich writes, for instance, that "the patchwork suits given the older male tap dancers are patronizingly clownish," he is expressing his own distaste for a stock character of black vaudeville that is no more patronizing than those of the commedia dell'arte. He is also making the insulting assumption that the veteran performers who created the number had no say in their costuming and furthermore would acquiesce in allowing themselves to be made foolish-looking by donning anything "given" them. Of course, he also misses the theatrical point, which is that the suits are, like the dancers, only pretending to be broken-down.

The humor here, like so much black humor, is based on irony. (One has only to think of Fats Waller's ad libs.) A sense of irony is absent from Feingold's review:

> The blues were born of poverty, suffering, and despair; even their white Tin Pan Alley imitations sing of loneliness and misery. But poverty and despair don't usually swank it in silver lamé; a chorus in tuxes and evening gowns, tapping away to "I can't give you anything but love, baby," is a cruel joke . . . . Cravenly, the show borrows the glamor of the great black entertainers of the past, but won't acknowledge the pain that spurred them on.

This numbing literal-mindedness is shared by Linda Winer in *Newsday*, who is similarly disturbed by the absence in *Black and Blue* of what she calls "the pain beneath the skin" and offended by the handling of the title song, comparing it unfavorably with its "heartbreakingly beautiful" presentation in *Ain't Misbehavin'*. It may have been heartbreaking, but it is hardly a reliable touchstone for the song that Razaf and Waller wrote in 1929. Here is a pretty accurate description of the song's musical arrangement and presentation in *Ain't Misbehavin'* by Frank Rich:

> . . . late in Act II . . . the company suddenly exposes the suffering within the Waller showmanship by harmonizing, in William Elliott's brilliant vocal arrangement, on the searing Andy Razaf lyrics for "Black and Blue." Staring out with ineffable dignity from a row of stools, the singers bring the theater to a hush by quietly floating the incantatory questions "Why was I born?" and "What did I do to be so black and blue?" into the haunted predawn light.

Elliott's antiphonal, hymnlike arrangement is sentimental and manipulative, far from the song's original presentation by Edith Wilson in *Hot Chocolates* (a recording was made), which was angry and defiant but without a hint of self-pity. Its musical arrangement and placement in *Ain't Misbehavin'* panders to the Broadway audience's social consciousness,

2 The thin critical ice on which Rich is skating in his review is evident in its internal inconsistency. "Ever-falling crimson velour curtains and flashing proscenium lights suggest the busy environments of television game shows rather than the chic opulence of the Harlem Renaissance," he writes. Then, in the next paragraph: "It's too bad that Mr. Segovia and Mr. Orezzoli didn't turn over more of their show to Mr. LeTang, who stages its wittiest numbers and also played a key role in the artistically overlapping and far superior *Sophisticated Ladies*." Preferring LeTang's slick Broadway professionalism to Atkins's personal artistry is a critic's prerogative. One wonders, however, which of LeTang's "wittiest numbers" Rich is referring to, since it was LeTang who staged the one with the ever-falling curtains ("Everybody Loves My Baby") and the one with the flashing proscenium lights ("That Rhythm Man"). LeTang also staged the finale with, in Rich's words, the "rows of nondescript monochromatic compartments, one per chorus dancer, that are rolled out with much fanfare" so that "for a few minutes, *Black and Blue* seems to have landed in a large international airport's restroom," and LeTang used the compartments again in "I Can't Give You Anything But Love." That leaves only one LeTang number critically intact: the kids' dance on a staircase, originally intended for, and in the style of, Fayard Nicholas.

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allowing them to experience a satisfying pang of guilt for having so blithely enjoyed the show. But cravenly (to borrow a locution), having supplied five minutes of penance, the show ends with a send-'em-home-happy finale. (It is called show *business*, after all.)[3]

Curious, this keenness on the part of white reviewers—midtown, downtown, and suburban—to have their hearts broken by seeing black performers acknowledge poverty, suffering, despair, and pain: they don't seem to feel they've had a genuine black artistic experience unless they've been made to feel guilty. But the blues are not about kvetching; they're about the sense of empowerment that comes from overcoming adversity: the stubborn insistence that, to borrow the final line of Big Maybelle Smith's "Cry Like a Baby" (performed in the show by Linda Hopkins), "Everything is gonna be all right."

Black and Blue is not without its flaws. The staging of one number, involving a large black disc, is a mistake; another, with Carrie Smith singing while seated on a swing, doesn't quite come off—not because there's anything inherently wrong with the concept but because it calls for a more lissome performer. The most serious problem, easily corrected, is the overamplification of the band, though this sadly appears to be the norm today on Broadway.

Considering the triumphs of *Black and Blue*, these are quibbles. The biggest triumph of all is that a show so true, in both letter and spirit, to the song and dance of the Twenties and Thirties should have made it to Broadway at all. A show that aims so high and hits so many of its targets deserves, at the very least, informed critical response.

3 The original song also included two verses that made it clear that it was, at least ostensibly, about discrimination by black men against dark-skinned women (e.g., "Brown and yellers all have fellers/ Gentlemen prefer them light"). This is considered unacceptable today, and in both *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Black and Blue* only the choruses are sung.

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Doubles and more doubles

by Bruce Bawer

Moon Palace, a strange and arresting new novel by Paul Auster, follows a flurry of outré offerings by this prolific American author.[1] Though barely in his forties, Auster is already well known for his writings in a variety of fields—translations of Frenchmen from Mallarmé to Sartre; original poetry, including the collections *Unearth* (1974) and *Wall Writing* (1976); a poignant memoir entitled *The Invention of Solitude* (1982); and the recent novel *In the Country of Last Things* (1987). Perhaps Auster's best-known productions, however, remain the novels of his *New York Trilogy*, which received considerable attention—and no small amount of critical acclaim—on their small-press publication in 1985 and 1986. Indeed, though *Moon Palace* is not a part of the trilogy, its thematic ties to these three novels are very strong, and a brief discussion of them may serve not only to provide some necessary background to Auster's most recent effort but to illuminate the distinctive and ever-developing literary vision that informs all four books.

On one level, the works of the *New York Trilogy* may be said to fall into a category of which many of us are justifiably suspicious: they're mysteries about Mystery, stories about Storytelling; like many a contemporary writer, Auster is hung up on the meaning of language, the enigma of naming, the philosophy of signification. The identity crisis suffered by Quinn, the mystery novelist-turned-detective who serves as the protagonist of *City of Glass*, is typical: Quinn (a) writes under the name of William Wilson, (b) finds himself taking on characteristics of his private-eye hero Max Work, and (c) is hired to do detective work because he has been mistaken for a sleuth named (yes) Paul Auster. Quinn's client identifies himself as Peter Stillman, but tells Quinn bluntly: "Peter Stillman is not my real name. So perhaps I am not Peter Stillman at all." Quinn's assignment is more in the line of, say, Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo than of Raymond Chandler: he is asked to shadow a linguistics professor whose obsessive search for mankind's *Ur*-language has led him to lock his son in a closet.

Ghosts, the second novel of the trilogy, also depicts one man hiring another to follow a third; the story's aggressively abstract nature is reflected in the fact that all its characters are named for colors: White, Black, Blue, and so forth. As for the detective protagonist of the third novel, *The Locked Room*, he doesn't have a name at all. Since boyhood he has been widely confused with a friend, an unpublished writer named Fanshawe; when Fanshawe suddenly disappears without explanation, the nameless detective takes over Fanshawe's life—wife, son, manuscripts, and all—and for some time thereafter struggles with his (and the wife's) feelings about the maybe-dead, maybe-not-dead writer.

1 *Moon Palace*, by Paul Auster; Viking, 397 pages, $18.95.

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The recurring elements in these novels are striking: detectives search out the truth about some bizarre circumstance or other, only to be unprepared for what they find; unexpected coincidences, correspondences, and connections abound; characters recognize each other as twins, as *Doppelgängern*, and act upon that recognition in remarkable fashion. In all of the *New York Trilogy* novels, very little is what it seems to be; as Auster puts his bemused gumshoes through their unsettling, often surreal paces, the purportedly stable and well defined melts before one's eyes, while the supposedly chaotic proves to conceal startling patterns, bonds, and similitudes. Among other things, Auster would seem to want us to come away from his trilogy with a newfound appreciation of the unpredictability of life and the relativity of identity, and with a stubborn reluctance to take anything for granted in the world around us. "What you finally learn from life," observes a character in *The Locked Room*, is "how strange it is. You can't keep up with what happens. You can't even imagine it." In a similar vein, *The Invention of Solitude* opens with the following sentence from Heraclitus: "In searching out the truth be ready for the unexpected, for it is difficult to find and puzzling when you find it." To be sure, no reader who has dipped into the so-called metafiction of William Gaddis, John Barth, and company will find Auster's surprises particularly surprising; plots such as those proffered in the *New York Trilogy* are everyday fare in the works of these academic novelists. And in their hands, make no mistake, such material typically makes not for "meta-novels," which take the form a step beyond itself, but for belabored, pretentious para-novels that betray nary a trace of human interest, narrative drive, or suspense.

Such is far from always the case with the *New York Trilogy*. Yes, such stratagems as Auster's naming of the characters in *Ghosts* after colors are tiresomely contrived, and his introduction of himself into the *dramatis personae* of *City of Glass* is too precious by half; at their best, however, these novels effectively tell suspenseful and compelling stories even as they productively contemplate the act (and art) of storytelling. Aside from Auster's native gifts for character, dialogue, and narrative, what saves these books from being self-indulgent and pseudo-intellectual exercises is that Auster's preoccupation with words and their relations does not derive from an empty allegiance to the fashionable idea that language is only about itself; rather, his preoccupation manifestly flows from a keen interest in the nature of physical reality, and an equally intense compulsion to define, as precisely as possible, the nature of the subtle and intricate nexus between the outer world of observable phenomena and the inner world of the endlessly observing, generalizing, and denominating human mind. To read these books in sequence is to get the impression that Auster is groping, intelligently and sincerely, toward an original and well-focused literary vision; indeed, Auster himself has said that the novels of his trilogy "are finally the same story, but [that] each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about."

Moon Palace might be said to represent yet another stage in that awareness—which is to say that it constitutes an even more accomplished attempt to capture, in fictional terms, the vision toward which Auster is reaching in his trilogy. The novel's protagonist is Marco Stanley Fogg, whose appellation alone will probably be the subject of a dissertation someday. Not only do Fogg's given names recall two of the great world travellers in history (Marco Polo and Henry Stanley), and not only does he share his last name with a dashing globetrotter from literature (Jules Verne's Phileas Fogg), but his initials also happen to be the abbreviation for the word *manuscript*—which is Auster's way of reminding us that Fogg is a literary creation, a man who exists only on paper. Fatherless at birth, and orphaned in childhood, Fogg is an eighteen-year-old undergraduate at Columbia University in the spring of 1966 when he suffers the loss of his Uncle Victor, "my only relative, my

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one link to something larger than myself."

This death sends Fogg into a nihilistic tailspin; irrationally resolving to abandon himself to "the chaos of the world" in the hope that "the world might ultimately reveal some secret harmony to me, some form or pattern that would help me to penetrate myself," he lives out his college years as a virtual hermit, doggedly reading his way through his uncle's thousand-volume library and letting his finances dwindle to nothing. By the time graduation rolls around, Fogg is homeless, bookless, and penniless; he spends several weeks as a Central Park vagrant, only to be rescued by a Chinese girl named Kitty Wu who has decided that they are spiritual twins. For reasons that are never made clear (can't he get anything better with a Columbia degree?), Fogg accepts a low-paying job as the companion and biographer of a rich, eccentric octogenarian named Thomas Effing, a sometime painter with his own story of youthful self-abandonment, isolation, and rebirth. Like Fogg's, Effing's name is not without meaning: when, decades ago, he threw over his former life as Julian Barber, he coined a crude moniker for himself (*f---ing*, get it?) that reflected his frustrations over the botch he'd made of his life. It is through Fogg's relationship with Effing that the world ultimately accords him a glimpse of "some secret harmony, some form or pattern" that helps him to penetrate himself—though (as is far from unusual in Austerreich) the glimpse comes too late for him to derive as much from it as he might otherwise have done; perhaps too late, even, for him to come away with anything more than a sense of frustration over lost possibilities.

The first thing that must be said about *Moon Palace* is that our hero's quest for secret harmony is far more cogently charted than in any of the novels of the *New York Trilogy*. Largely, perhaps, because Auster has grown more adept at translating his preoccupations into the language of action and form, *Moon Palace* feels more assured than its predecessors, and has a satisfying sense of closure that they lack. Even more than those books, it is (to borrow Geoffrey O'Brien's description of *City of Glass*) a well-choreographed "dance of doppelgängers," an intellectually engaging meditation on self and other, solitude and society, mind and matter—and, not least of all, on art as "a method of understanding, a way of penetrating the world and finding one's place in it." It is certainly more realistic than the *New York Trilogy*—which is to say that the series of far-fetched coincidences upon which its resolution depends occur in a context that, in every other respect, seems thoroughly congruent with the world as we know it. The novel's prose, meanwhile—lean, fluid, vigorous, and delightfully lucid—marks (if anything) an advance in sophistication over the more hard-boiled, staccato manner of the earlier fiction. But then, Auster's style has from the beginning been his greatest strength.

Perhaps *Moon Palace*'s most signal virtue, in comparison with the *New York Trilogy* novels, lies in the roundness of its two principal characters. It is a testament to Auster's imaginative powers that Fogg's behavior, though at times wildly illogical and inexplicable, feels credible and consistent almost without exception, and that this often less-than-admirable character manages to provoke in the reader an impressive level of interest and sympathy. As for Effing, though at times he seems a bit too much of a standard-issue crazy old coot, the blind, wheelchair-bound old man is on the whole a lifelike and highly colorful creation, and Fogg's relationship with him is light years more vivid, complex, and believable than Fogg's perfunctorily evoked romance with Kitty (who, alas, remains stubbornly one-dimensional throughout). As in the *New York Trilogy*, moreover, the island of Manhattan is itself a major and full-bodied presence. In contrast to the expertly rendered tableaux of busy, upscale metropolitan nine-to-fivers that are offered up in, say, Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* and the novels of Louis Auchincloss, Auster concentrates here on a different, but no less real, New York: that of the isolato, the outsider, the midday wanderer in the streets.

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Then there's the moon, which at times seems to crop up on every page of *Moon Palace*. Why? Because Auster is concerned with Fogg's—and, by extension, with every individual's—need for a "link to something larger" than himself, for "a way of penetrating the world and finding one's place in it," and the moon is symbolically useful in this regard. As Effing explains to Fogg, "[Y]ou can't fix your position on the earth without referring to some point in the sky. Something to do with triangulation, the technique of measurement . . . . A man can't know where he is on the earth except in relation to the moon or a star." At the Brooklyn Museum, Fogg studies *Moonlight*, a painting by Ralph Albert Blakelock, and wonders "if Blakelock hadn't painted his sky green in order to . . . make a point of showing the connection between heaven and earth. If men can live comfortably in their surroundings, he seemed to be saying, if they can learn to feel themselves a part of the things around them, then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness." It is the universal need for this sense of connectedness that Auster seeks most urgently to communicate in *Moon Palace*, and the moon, with its modest but steady presence, serves his symbolic purposes well. (A transfiguring sense of one's connectedness to humanity does not, after all, announce itself glaringly like the sun, but, like the moon, waits quietly to be discovered and appreciated; moreover, moonlight is *reflected* light.)

Yet it must be said that the references to the moon proliferate here to the point of distraction, and even (at times) to the point of ludicrousness: Uncle Victor's band is called the Moonlight Moods; Fogg's favorite Chinese restaurant is the Moon Palace; a fortune cookie at the Moon Palace reads: "The sun is the past, the earth is the present, the moon is the future." The novel begins with a mention of the Apollo 11 moon landing, and ends with Fogg staring up at the full moon as it finds "its place in the darkness." It's all rather overdone.

Potentially even more problematic are Effing's bizarre life story—which, as dictated to Fogg by Effing, occupies most of the middle third of the novel—and the astonishing connections which that story ultimately brings to light. "Our lives are determined by manifold contingencies," Fogg observes at one point, and as *Moon Palace* advances, one flagrant contingency after another reveals itself. Auster perpetrates coincidences which in most novels would be deemed impermissibly contrived; and it is admittedly true that at the moment when one suddenly realizes where all the pieces of Fogg's puzzle fit, one balks at the flagrant improbability of the whole thing, and may even be tempted to fling the book across the room. But then one finds oneself accepting Auster's coincidences—partly because (like the absurd-but-gripping reversals in John Fowles's novel *The Magus*) they're the point of the story, and partly because Auster drops them into place with such unflinching, brazen finesse. Even more significantly, perhaps, one recognizes that Auster *understands* coincidences—that, in other words, he has taken note of and reflected seriously upon the sense of harmony, of magic, and even of transcendence that a striking coincidence can inspire, and has brought these reflections to bear upon his story.

To reveal the specific nature of the coincidences in *Moon Palace* would be equivalent to giving away the name of the killer in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. So I won't do it. But I will say that at the heart of *Moon Palace*, as well as of all three *New York Trilogy* novels, lies a complex and powerful obsession—an obsession, namely, with the theme of fathers and sons, with the notion of family as an indispensable means of connection with the world beyond oneself, and with the sense of alienation and directionlessness that can be the lot of the solitary and fatherless. Something of a key to this obsession may be found in *The Invention of Solitude*, an account of Auster's too-early loss and too-late discovery of his father, an enigmatic man whose memory seems to have become, after his death, the

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chief motive force in Auster's creative consciousness. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, this brief memoir establishes that Paul Auster's work in the novel constitutes, in essence, a remarkable transmutation of private grief into public art. *Moon Palace* testifies that he is accomplishing that transmutation with ever-increasing skill.

Like Paul Auster, the English art historian Anita Brookner has progressed from first novelist to established literary figure in a single extremely productive decade. At first blush, however, it would seem as if that is where the similarity between these two writers ends. For if Auster's audacious inventions about sleuths and self-seekers have often been compared to the works of such wildmen and puzzlemakers as Fielding, Sterne, Swift, Twain, and Nabokov, Anita Brookner's eight slim, low-voltage novels of unremarkable families and sheltered spinsters have been likened to the works of such delicate stylists as Flaubert, Jane Austen, and Barbara Pym. More polar opposites, it would seem, could hardly be imagined.

To read through Brookner's fictional oeuvre, however—from her first novel, *A Start in Life* (1981), published in America as *The Debut*, to her newest offering, *Latecomers*—is to notice a number of curious parallels.[2] Human isolation and connection, for one thing, are as central to Brookner as they are to Auster. In *A Start in Life* and *Providence*, fortyish women professors make timid efforts to carve a niche for themselves in the world of the sexually active and the happily married, but fail ignominiously, ultimately resigning themselves to grim, loveless futures. In *Look at Me*, a lonely lady art curator lives quietly with an old family housekeeper; *The Misalliance* depicts the equally narrow existence of an intelligent middle-aged woman whose husband has left her for someone in whom she "can discern not the slightest spark of imagination." And *Hotel du Lac* concerns a thirty-nine-year-old romance novelist who in the space of a few days leaves her fiancé at the altar, kisses off her inattentive married lover, and turns down the marriage proposal of a well-to-do womanizer, opting instead to carry on with her sedate, solitary existence.

The typical heroine of one of these books leads a life of quiet hopelessness, of numbing routine. Her social life consists largely of banal conversations over lunch or tea with her happier, busier, and often rather patronizing lady friends. Although, compared to the average woman, she tends to have a glamorous-sounding, intellectually challenging career (usually in London), she derives little pleasure from it; for the most part, her job seems to be a way of giving structure and a semblance of meaning to a life devoid of strong emotional entanglements, of explosive confrontations, of outbursts or breakdowns or bliss. Plainly, such Auster titles as *The Locked Room* and *The Invention of Solitude* would not be out of place in this oeuvre; from the beginning of each of Brookner's stories of hopeless spinsters, it is obvious that our heroine will remain an isolato, will never break out of the locked room of her life, will never change herself in any significant respect.

So monotonous, indeed, is the life of the typical Brookner heroine that if one were to remove the Briticisms, to replace the occasional conversation about art or literature with a chat about television game shows, and to translate into Basic English the handful of sentences in French, one might almost confuse these plainly told stories of uneventful lives with those of the middle-class Americans in Ann Beattie's fiction, or of the trailer-park habitués that populate Bobbie Ann Mason country. You might confuse them, that is, were it not for Brookner's exquisite prose, her formidable powers of characterization, her firm moral tone, and her profound sympathy for her hapless protagonists. Brookner may give her heroines brutally dull lives, but she doesn't, on that account, condescend to them, depersonalize them, treat them as clichés, or make facile use of them to convey simplistic

2 *Latecomers*, by Anita Brookner; Pantheon, 248 pages, $16.95.

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messages about the society they live in. Her aim is to capture the textures of their lives, the bent of their minds; and this she does with astonishing grace and acuity.

Beattie and Mason and their minimalistic confrères are not Brookner's only poor literary cousins. Like Auster, she has borrowed from a popular subliterary genre. While Auster has made use of the conventions of the detective story—choosing for his protagonists private eyes who seek not criminal culprits so much as cosmic truths about identity and interrelation—Brookner has made use of the conventions of romance fiction, presenting us at the outset of one book after another with a lonesome, worthy female in search of romance, true love, wedlock. Like Auster, she rises above category fiction not only by virtue of her talents, but by refusing to work within that category's prescribed boundaries. To be sure, like the most loyal romance-novel reader, Brookner believes in the importance of finding one's true love; but she looks upon the contemporary courtship ritual with an unsentimental eye whose observations are bracing, even disturbing. Like most romance-novel heroines—and, for that matter, like Auster's protagonists—her heroines are queer and solitary questers, bemused by their claustrophobic lives, hungry for a taste of coherence, of transcendence, of human communion. Unlike true romance-novel heroines, however, Brookner's ladies invariably end up alone.

In *Latecomers*, as it happens, Brookner moves beyond the lonely heroines of most of her previous novels. Instead, she tells the story of no fewer than four lonely middle-aged people, the Thomas Hartmanns and the Thomas Fibiches. One of the remarkable things about this novel is that, although it is not much longer than any of its predecessors, it manages to cover a great deal more territory than most. Whereas *Hotel du Lac*, for example, takes place over a period of several days, *Latecomers* is set over a period of decades; if most of Brookner's novels concentrate on investigating a single soul, by the end of *Latecomers* one feels as if one has come to know half a dozen people quite well. The structure is deceptively simple. Chapter one introduces us to Hartmann, a London businessman; as a boy in Nazi-era Germany, he saw his parents "driven off, never to be seen again," but he now does his best to guard against those memories, taking a voluptuary's pleasure in fine meals, good manicures, and well-cut suits. The second chapter focuses on his wife, Yvette, a Frenchwoman whose father was killed during the Nazi occupation but who is serious about nothing except maintaining her "aura of femininity." Chapter three introduces us to Fibich, Hartmann's lifelong friend and his partner in the greeting-card business, an "abstract and uncommunicative" man who is as tormented by bitter wartime memories and anxieties as Hartmann is free of them; chapter four gives us Fibich's wife, Christine, a homemaker who is as abstract and uncommunicative as her spouse. In the ensuing chapters we meet the Hartmanns' daughter and the Fibiches' son, and watch them grow from infants into young adults as their parents gradually approach old age.

The families are close. Both couples reside in Ashley Gardens, an apartment house near Victoria Station, and their social lives appear to consist mostly of quiet evenings spent in each other's company. Neither marriage is a love match, and all four partners have occasional unspoken longings for sunnier climes or more emancipated mates. Yet the only truly disruptive ripple in the pond, it would seem, is Fibich's perpetual unease: he feels "like a survivor. As if I arrived where I am by accident . . . . As if I will never catch up until I find out what went before." In his distress he forms a marked contrast to the serene Hartmann, who considers himself to be not a survivor but a latecomer, a man "enjoying his latter age more than most people are supposed to enjoy their youth." (The phrase "Look! We have come through!" serves almost as his motto.) Increasingly possessed by a longing "to know what his life had been before he

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could remember it," Fibich believes that if he were to visit his hometown of Berlin, his long-suppressed memories of childhood would be awakened, and he would at last be able to live in peace and love, and to become "absorbed in lives other than his own." Chapter by chapter, Fibich works up the courage to make the journey.

Otherwise, very little happens in this book, by the usual standards of fiction: the years pass, the children finish school and move away, Yvette's figure fills out. The men continue to put in their days at work, shortening their hours somewhat as they pass from early to late middle age. Nobody changes dramatically. Yet the characters' self-images and their attitudes toward one another undergo considerable if barely acknowledged modulations, which Brookner captures with meticulous artfulness. Fibich, having acquired a psychoanalyst, becomes even less communicative with Christine; her initial contentment with her marriage and home, in turn, becomes "thin, brittle, and then [begins] to vanish altogether." Perhaps the most discombobulating event of their lives is the growth of their children into adulthood. The beautiful and reticent Marianne Hartmann becomes a man-shy office drone, and then a dowdy wife and mother; the handsome and rambunctious Toto Fibich develops into a restless, hedonistic, and rather irresponsible young man whom his parents look upon as something of a stranger, an intrusive force in their lives:

> The problem was not only how to accommodate him but to hide him from the fact that the lives of his parents were enacted against a background that was essentially tragic. Toto turned them into conspirators in their effort to behave like ordinary people, but even here their collusion was painful, for they knew that in Toto's eyes they had failed to be the parents he wanted. They were either too old or too joyless or too easily shocked to please him: whatever their faults, they knew that he found them reprehensible. Fibich's hysterical fears for his son's well-being, and Christine's abstraction and restraint, were, they knew, not good for a young man who had rapidly become more emancipated than either of them. They felt that they could only be themselves when he was not there . . . .

To his parents, the narcissistic, womanizing Toto seems totally alien. Yet even after he has become a successful television actor, it is clear that, despite his glamorous, jet-setting life, he is as much a product of his childhood environment as Marianne. Charming and gregarious though he is, he doesn't really connect with other people; he moves among them, forging superficial and expedient attachments, constantly playacting and using them. For all his shows of independence, he continues to return home occasionally to sit quietly with his parents and their friends, as if it is only in this airless setting that he truly feels comfortable, feels himself.

As the above-quoted passage suggests, Brookner does a lot more telling than showing in *Latecomers*. There is little dialogue; we don't have many opportunities to see the characters interacting. Theoretically this should be regarded as a structural flaw, but Brookner is so elegant and precise a teller that her summary expository passages prove to be at least as absorbing and vivid as many a stormy dialogue scene in another writer's work. Besides, it would hardly be appropriate for a novel about four such unsociable types as the Hartmanns and the Fibiches to concentrate on dialogue; the whole point of *Latecomers* is that these four live mostly inside themselves, unable to connect, even with each other, in any meaningful sense—and this in spite of the fact that the two men share an almost identical past, as well as the same first name. (Talk about *Doppelgängern*!) By the end of the novel, it is plain that Brookner's minimal use of dialogue has succeeded marvelously in conveying the lack of real communication among the protagonists, even as her steady, low-key exposition has done a magnificent job of limning the contours of all four characters' pathetically impoverished inner lives.

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For all her attention to lovelorn females, *Latecomers* does not mark the first time that Brookner has written about families. The Hartmanns and Fibiches, in fact, are in many ways reminiscent of the family which, in *Family and Friends*, escapes the Continent for London during the Nazi era, and whose children, in one sense or another, remain forever the prisoners of its old-fashioned, hidebound ways of thinking. More than one Brookner heroine, furthermore, traces her inwardness and repression to an upbringing by a family very much like the ones in *Family and Friends* and *Latecomers*. As Fibich realizes when he finally makes it to Berlin, "nobody grows up." Each of us carries with him all of his past selves, "waiting to be reactivated in moments of pain, of fear, of danger. Everything is retrievable, every shock, every hurt." But it occurs to Fibich that, after a while, one may be obliged "to abandon the stock of time that one carries within oneself, to discard it in favour of the present, so that one's embrace may be turned outwards to the world in which one has made one's home."

Fibich never truly succeeds in discarding his past, any more than Hartmann stops hiding from his own. But Fibich *is* eventually able to recognize, and to look with awe upon, the remarkable achievement of his son's acting: though unable to shake off the emotional incapacities that his parents have bequeathed him, Toto has managed to convert those incapacities into a professional asset, into "a quality of inwardness bordering on enchantment, a quality not remote from melancholy but with a strength about it that they had never known." Watching Toto on television, consequently, the Fibiches have the odd sensation that Toto is "theirs, and yet not theirs," that he is "their apotheosis." Reading this passage—and knowing, too, that Brookner, the unmarried middle-aged daughter of eccentric Polish-born parents, has acknowledged the manifold parallels between the inward, lonely lives in her novels and her own biography—one cannot help thinking of Toto as Brookner's own *Doppelgänger*, the histrionic double of a novelist whose own most distinctive aesthetic asset is "a quality of inwardness bordering on enchantment, a quality not remote from melancholy but with a strength about it."

What's the use?

Barbara Herrnstein Smith Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory. Harvard University Press, 229 pages, $22.50

reviewed by Bradley W. Bloch

When historians look back over the state of Western thought during the closing decades of this century, they may well call it the Age of Nihilism. From religion to anthropology, the primary goal is no longer to understand the world but rather to question hostilely the nature of understanding itself. Thus, instead of building upon the foundations of rational discourse, we are confronted with claims that these foundations are illusory. The most public focus of such skepticism has been directed, of late, toward the college curriculum. Why, we are asked, should universities continue to teach the traditional canon of Western civilization? Is not our habit of granting special or, to use the term in vogue, "privileged" status to some things over others merely an attempt by certain people to achieve social superiority at the expense of others?

Obviously, this is not a mere theoretical question but rather the first assault in a Kulturkampf. Unfortunately, the popular press, even as it has rushed to cover the controversy, has largely portrayed it as one of those niggling disputes that occur with regularity in the groves of academe. "Given the probing, contentious nature of scholarly minds," wrote Ezra Bowen in a *Time* magazine article on the revision of Stanford's core curriculum, "any permanent settlement of these centuries-old issues seems unlikely." In a similar vein, James Atlas, in his cover story last June for *The New York Times Magazine*,

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entitled "The Battle of the Books," explained that "'opening up the canon,' as the effort to expand the curriculum is called, isn't as radical as it seems. It's a populist, grass-roots phenomenon, American to the core."

Toward the end of the article, Atlas turned his attention to Barbara Herrnstein Smith, last year's president of the Modern Language Association and a professor of comparative literature and English at Duke University. Of her then upcoming treatise, *Contingencies of Value*, he wrote:

> [It] is an exasperating book, especially in the first chapter, where Smith goes on about her life as a professor . . . .
>
> Still, for all her confessional posturing, her self-professed "monstrous" immodesty, Smith is on to something. What is taste? What do we experience when we contemplate a work of art? . . . Who decides what's in and what's out? Those who possess "cultural power." What is art? Whatever the literary establishment says it is.
>
> Smith's recent work is, among other things, a shrewd polemic against "high-culture critics" intent upon "epistemic self-stabilization" (that is to say, maintaining the status quo). Just who are these critics? A tribe of "non-acculturated intellectuals," "post-modern cosmopolites," "exotic visitors and immigrants." In other words, professors.

That many more people have read this account of Smith's book than will read the book itself makes Atlas's simplistic appraisal even more offensive than it might otherwise be. *Contingencies of Value* is indeed an exasperating book, but not because Smith talks about her life as a professor in its opening pages. It is exasperating because—in a kind of reductio ad absurdum of all the worst trends in academic thought at the moment—she challenges not merely traditional notions of culture but ultimately the existence of culture itself. In order to understand this, however, it is necessary to look past the first chapter.

A specialist in Shakespearean literature, Smith begins by noting that, at different points in her career, sonnets which she had earlier thought "awkward, strained, silly" turned out to provide her with "the finest and most intense kind of literary experience of which I am capable." This she offers as a microcosm of mankind's experience with the sonnets: at different times they have been valued differently by their various audiences. Indeed, they were once the targets of harsh critiques by Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Byron. How then, given its apparently fickle nature, are we to understand literary evaluation, or indeed value itself?

Like many others, Smith begins her answer to these questions by defining herself against Northrop Frye. In Smith's view, our task of understanding literary judgments is made more difficult because of the "exile of evaluation" from literary criticism: criticism's relentless drive to become systematic and scientific has reduced the discussion of value to a "moral lapse." The blame for this she drops squarely in Frye's lap.

But it is not at all clear that Frye intended to banish evaluation from criticism. In the "Polemical Introduction" to *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), he argued that literary criticism stood divided between "scholars" whose increasing output of secondary literature lacked any sense of direction and "public critics" who, without a coherent guide to their object of discussion, were left to evaluate works solely on the basis of personal taste. The remedy for this, Frye proposed, was a poetics that would outline the fundamental principles of literature in the same manner that the laws of physics govern the material world. Rather than determine which novels should be counted as masterpieces, it seemed the wiser first to decide what exactly we mean when we speak of a "novel." The rest, including aesthetic discriminations, would follow from there.

It is obvious that for Frye literary evaluation presupposed certain fundamental agreements: about what literature is and

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what we expect from it, what the different types of literature are and the marks of excellence in each. It is also clear that we are much, much further from those agreements today than we were when Frye proposed them some thirty years ago. Indeed, concord on such matters is no longer considered desirable. "The type of investigation I have in mind here," Smith explains at the outset of her book, "would not seek to establish normative 'criteria,' to devise presumptively objective evaluative procedures . . . . It would seek, rather, to clarify the nature of literary—and, more broadly, aesthetic—value in conjunction with a more general rethinking of the concept of 'value.'"

The nature of value, of course, was one of the fundamental questions of the Enlightenment. What do we mean when we say that something is good? Both Kant and Hume distinguished between an appeal to objective authority ("It is good") and a statement of personal taste ("It is pleasurable to me"). In our own day, Alasdair MacIntyre has blamed much of the shrillness of philosophical debate on a conflating of the two.

Smith responds to this long-standing philosophical discussion by rejecting the notion of objective value altogether; to her, it is a form of social control. She accuses Hume, for example, of serving not "a general interest or communal goal but the evaluative authority of some members of the community over others." Attempts at developing a canon, or a consensus of standards, are thus nothing but efforts to "privilege" one group over another. Indeed, in her view the recent protests over educational decline and cultural decay are simply the brayings of a formerly privileged class who, its authority no longer justified by society, must now share a growing amount of public space and time with those of different inclinations.

The solution to these competing claims, Smith argues, is to establish a kind of value-neutral value system wherein the notion of value is replaced by that of utility. What is valuable then becomes only what is useful, and what is useful is dependent upon "the personal economy constituted by the subject's needs." There is no concept of transcendent value because there is no standard "out there" by which to measure it; indeed, there is no value in the object itself, only the needs of the person contemplating it. Likewise, there is no objective "good"—only goods on the shelves of an all-encompassing marketplace. A good (Shakespeare's sonnets, a pound of beef) "is that *for* which and *into* which any other name or form of value can—'on demand,' we might say—be (ex)changed."

A good deal of *Contingencies of Value* is devoted to defending the economic nature of this model. Smith tells us that, traditionally, society has recognized two economies. The first, governing business and banking, places a high value on the acquisition of material assets and a low value on aesthetic enrichment and spiritual growth. The second, governing the church and the university, trumpets aesthetics while casting an evil eye on material gain; as a corollary, it recoils from the idea that art or literature could have "utility."

For Smith, however, these two economies are merely the inverse of each other and ultimately indistinguishable: "There is no 'economic' activity, per se," she writes. "There is simply activity." The false dualism which divides them has been perpetuated by "humanists," whose "redemptionist" authority is founded upon maintaining a clear boundary between the purity of culture and the depravities of commerce. It is an odd spectacle indeed to witness a recent president of the Modern Language Association railing against humanists, but such are the times in which we are living.

On the face of it, a *Weltanschauung* in which Shakespeare is worth no more than what he is worth to each individual seems susceptible to charges of relativism. Smith claims, however, that it is an objectivist "fallacy" to say that if there is no absolute standard then everything is of equal value. Value, after all, has been replaced by utility, and not everything is of equal utility in a given situation.

But surely this is a radical kind of

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relativism. Since all evaluations are utilitarian and situational, there is no way of making distinctions among them. They are all equally beyond the reach of what we used to call critical judgment. Moreover, one must still ask: What *is* this "utility" that has replaced so much? Do all "needs" have an equal claim on our attention? Ultimately, the central role of utility in Smith's model begs the question of what it is that is useful to man. Smith maintains that there is no answer to this question, for it is impossible to say what "man" is. She points instead to "our irreducible *scrappiness*." She goes on to explain: "I wish to suggest with this term not only that the elements that interact to constitute our motives and behavior are incomplete and heterogenous, like scraps of things, but also ('scrap' being a slang term for fight) that they are mutually conflicting or at least always potentially at odds." The individual, powered by these various "selves," careens between the rational and irrational, part of a system "good enough to keep us—and thus *them*, the interactions—going."

Contingencies of Value provides a clear—and horrifying—picture of a brave new world: no community, no society, only detached, unconnected individuals buying and selling in an inchoate existential marketplace. It is a world of vastly lowered expectations, where the best for which we can hope is, in Smith's words, to just "keep going."

Like many of those toiling within the academy, Smith's goal is to lay the foundation for a culture whose guiding virtue is that it "offends" no one. But clearly this leaves us with no culture at all. For what is culture—any culture—but the shared priorities, vocabulary, and institutions of a community, established in the face of other, rejected, possibilities? In Smith's world, not only is there no Western culture, but, just as important, there is no Eastern or African culture, to take just two other possibilities (poignant because it is often in the name of these cultures that those who attack the Western canon raise their battle cry). Instead, the world is fragmented, atomized into its smallest constituent part: for Smith, every man is an island.

The task that so frustrates Smith—finding and defending criteria to determine what is true and good—has been, for most of history, the fundamental labor of philosophy known as justification. The prevailing argument from the Classical Age through the Enlightenment rested on an appeal to Nature. That which is true is naturally evident to anyone whose faculties of perception and reason are unclouded by internal imperfection or external influence. Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" embodies this view:

> In each creature, there is a sound and a defective state; and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a true standard of taste and sentiment . . . .
>
> Many and frequent are the defects in the internal organs, which prevent or weaken the influence of those general principles, on which depends our sentiment of beauty or deformity.

It was with this method of analysis—justification by Nature—that the philosophers of the Enlightenment sought to build a reviewing stand that was both ahistorical and transcultural. The question then becomes how one is to know what "human nature" is. Later in his essay, Hume exhorts the critic to "preserve his mind free from all *prejudice*, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his observation." It was one of the legacies of the Enlightenment that prejudice was given the bad name it enjoys today. Before that time, the term was neutral, not implying "false belief" but referring only to the set of values brought to bear upon a decision.

The difficulty with Hume's strategy is, of course, that it is not possible for someone to "allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his observation." For Smith, the only way around this problem is to abandon the enterprise of justification altogether. The result is ironic. She takes

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Hume to task for invoking "universal, underlying principles of human nature" as a guide to aesthetic judgment. But her own position is not so different: she has merely replaced his world guided by Nature with a mechanistic one guided by the rules of exchange, which are, for her, every bit as universal as Hume's principles.

Given that Nature does not provide a solid base, upon what justification can the Western canon stand? Perhaps the answer is to be found within the qualities of the canon itself. Although the Enlightenment called for an appeal to Nature, its enduring touchstone is that of History. It is telling that Smith uses ellipses to omit from her extensive quotations of "Of the Standard of Taste" all but the first two sentences of the following passage:

> The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with.

One of the crowning achievements of Western culture is this self-reflective quality. Smith, for all her talk of elites, does not understand the limits of their power in the face of historical understanding. Elites change, political winds shift; so, indeed, does taste. When Smith remarks at the beginning of her book that various Shakespearean sonnets have been subjected to the criticisms of Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, et al., her intent is to raise our eyebrows at the capriciousness of personal taste and thus of the canon itself. What she does not see is that Shakespeare is a part of the canon not *in spite* of these attacks but *because* of them; the qualities which give Shakespeare his place in our culture are those which, through the dialogue of history, transcend the verdict of individual critics, no matter how influential.

Here, then, is a justification of the Western canon: history itself. In our cultural development we are not pulled forward by an ideal of human nature but rather pushed from behind by the achievements of the past. It is this conversation with the past which critics of the canon wish to sever, but they offer nothing in the place of history other than the flimsy reeds of cultural relativism and political expediency.

Detached from historical justification, art and literature could indeed be seen to be merely the objects of personal taste and caprice—hardly worth fighting over. It is thus not surprising that Smith spends so much time defending the notion of the utility of art and literature but is unable to say *why* they are useful. In her world, void of history, there is no intellectual or creative tradition with which to interact, only immediate desires to be fulfilled, an aesthetic carpe diem which looks neither forward nor back. The Western canon does both, telling us where we have been and where we are going. Dispensing with it, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith has done, reduces art and literature to baubles and keepsakes. It hardly seems a profitable exchange.

Israelis and discontents

A. B. Yehoshua Five Seasons. Trans. from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin. Doubleday, 359 pages, $19.95

reviewed by Lauren Weiner

The stereotypes of the different kinds of Jew who make up the state of Israel are relatively well known. In his engaging new novel, *Five Seasons*, Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua fails to enlarge our conception of these types, but

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he does use their standard traits to good novelistic advantage.

The hero of *Five Seasons* is Molkho (first name undisclosed), a Sephardic Jew whose wife—a German Jew who civilized her earthy, Levantine husband by inculcating in him such habits as taking a shower daily and attending the opera—has just breathed her last. She had been dying of cancer for the last seven years and Molkho, an accountant for the Israeli government, had been caring for her in their apartment in the port city of Haifa. Molkho's wife has died painfully but at home, as she wanted.

Molkho was a patient, loving husband and is now a grieving widower. Yet his thoughts and actions also show him to be a petty, resentful, and indecisive man. He is emotionally bottled up and apt to lash out, moved by what his wife had called "hidden unconscious motives." As the couple's three grown children stay with her lifeless body, Molkho broods over the prospect of more people showing up to pay their last respects: "What did her dead body matter? All along he had taken good care of her, everyone knew that he had, and now all at once he was to blame for her death, for which he was being held accountable."

That remark will gain significance later in the story, but at this early stage it strikes the reader as an irrational expression of guilt and resentment. Other less-than-endearing qualities of Molkho's include his morbid fascination with the sick and the dying. He can't seem to let go of the nursing role in which he served his late wife. (When he visits other people's houses he snoops in their bathroom medicine cabinets.) He is, to top it off, a terrible tightwad.

And yet for all that, we like him. That we do is a tribute to Yehoshua's ability to build a living, breathing human being out of what is initially a somewhat inert set of distasteful personality quirks. A stocky, robust man of fifty-one (who still has his dark good looks and "Asiatic" robustness), Molkho moves in a world of impatient creatures who treat his Sephardic simplicity and vehemence with varying degrees of condescension. Molkho even hears his wife's voice from beyond the grave, nagging him to eat politely and stand up straight.

It is this sense of the dancing bear tormented by somewhat capricious keepers that gradually gets the reader on Molkho's side, despite his faults. Then, too, we feel for Molkho in his attempt to return from the world of cancer and death. To bring himself out of his bereavement he searches, guiltily but eagerly, for a new mate. Through each of the novel's "five seasons," autumn to autumn, a new female occupies his attention.

One is a high-powered widow who works in Molkho's office at a job very senior to his own. Heavily made up to enhance her fading attractions, she is, like his wife, a German-Jewish Israeli, or *yekke*, whose brains and refinement intimidate him. Their budding relationship is scotched by a mishap that befalls her when she and Molkho meet for an assignation in Berlin. The mishap—she sprains her ankle as they leave the Berlin opera house and is given a knockout dose of painkillers back at their hotel—is partly his fault. And so, with "her eyes a cold, intellectual glitter," the woman tells Molkho she has figured out the following rather shocking fact: he slowly killed his wife.

> "Try to understand," she persists, not wanting to hurt him yet intent on pursuing her insight. "I don't mean that you did it consciously, but I felt today that you were trying to kill me too."

The *yekkes* always pursue their insights—that's the problem with them, in Molkho's opinion. Uri Adler is another one. Uri was Molkho's spiritual adviser during the latter's high school days. This "eternal Kierkegaardian-Buberian truth seeker," as Molkho calls him, is a hippie-ish wanderer who has settled down and become an orthodox Jew. Uri has appeared on the scene to offer Molkho his own wife (and incidentally to disclose, with the quiz-show-like reflexes of the *yekke*, the ending of *Anna Karenina*, which Molkho has been trying to finish for months). Uri's wife, Ya'ara, is a former schoolmate whom Molkho vaguely

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remembers having had a crush on over thirty years ago. She has had many miscarriages; because Uri craves children, he wants to marry her off to Molkho so he can remarry a younger woman and start a family.

Arranged marriages make Molkho a little uncomfortable, but he's game. "If they were good enough for the Middle Ages," he decides pragmatically, "they're good enough for me." With his sharp eye for the imperfections of aging womanhood, however, Molkho can't quite bring himself to make love to this sweet but drab woman and thereby clinch the deal. Ya'ara is also a "type" we've seen before, the underside, really, of the Jewish Princess coin. She is subdued, vague, and doesn't know how to dress. She is a shlub.

It is a sweltering summer in Haifa, and Molkho takes Ya'ara to a classical music concert. Unfortunately for his hard-won, conventional musical taste, the program is modern. (Ya'ara has no opinion on this, or apparently any other, subject.)

> Indeed, the music was harsh and cerebral: no sooner did the violin play a lyric bar than the cello and the viola overcame it, attacking the theme and breaking it down analytically. At first, he could see [Ya'ara] was following, her eyes fixed on the musicians, yet soon her attention wandered. He smiled at her mournfully, glancing down at her dusty shoes with their still neatly folded bobbysocks . . . . Once more he noticed the curly blond down on her legs. How can I kiss a woman with so much fuzz? he wondered gloomily. And her black handbag would have to go too. Her bulge of a belly rose and fell as though an unborn child kept getting up and sitting down there, each time about to walk out on the avant-garde trio that chose to play such highbrow music on so heat-struck a summer night.

Molkho comes close to willing himself to fall in love with Ya'ara, who after all has her good points. We are led to see her as the most suitable of the novel's seasonal series of candidates: more deserving than the widow, or the silly friend of his mother-in-law's, a Russian émigré who doesn't like Israel and wants to repatriate to the Soviet Union, and more appropriate than the eleven-year-old Indian girl he becomes smitten with in a village in the Galilee (an infatuation he is far too embarrassed to do anything about). Still, it's no go. Ya'ara and her husband are disappointed that Molkho remains inhibited, depressed about his wife's death. He once told Uri of the galling accusation made against him by the widow in Berlin. Uri now concurs: "You haven't begun to confront your guilt for having killed her." The charge, so ridiculous on its face, has a certain psychological truth to it, and Molkho resigns himself to that truth in the novel's rather disappointing final pages. During all those difficult years of caring for her, Molkho was shepherding his wife to her end; he couldn't help wanting the end to arrive.

Nor do we necessarily blame him. The *yekke* conspiracy that threads its way through *Five Seasons* gets to be a bit much. Indeed, the Sephardi/Ashkenazi dichotomy at the heart of the book, good though the book is, inevitably wears out its welcome. (I have not mentioned Mrs. Starkman, Molkho's impeccably self-possessed mother-in-law, or the patronizing Mr. Shimoni, an "over-refined" Russian-Jewish official.)

Having laid out this rather rigid scheme, Yehoshua at times has trouble sticking with it: Molkho occasionally "breaks character," as they say in the theater. (How did he know what a Kierkegaardian-Buberian was?) Still, Molkho is good company. And the Israel he inhabits—it is presented here as an austerely beautiful land, a place of possibility, even and perhaps especially in the war-threatened, unfinished villages of the Galilee—surely needs him. Molkho's wife was wont to see in him a "dangerously Levantine, apolitical naïveté that was leading the country to catastrophe." What we are supposed to see, however, is that he rather likes the Israeli Arabs (they're much thriftier than Jews, he thinks admiringly); he tolerates, while he does not agree with, the ultraorthodox Jews who stone cars driving on the Sabbath; and

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he absorbs the teachings of the Europeans even as he resents the hell out of them. In short, Molkho and his ilk appear to be the glue holding the country together.

Nearly every page of *Five Seasons* displays a sureness of detail that is very pleasing to behold. Moreover, Yehoshua really knows how to tell a story, although the plot loses momentum near the end, after Molkho has been enlisted to take his mother-in-law's Russian friend to Vienna to try to get her back into the Soviet Union. Before leaving Europe, Molkho stays on in East Berlin trying to locate the street where his late wife was raised. At this point, flashes of personal insight are coming to him with unconvincing frequency; it is as if Yehoshua is in a hurry to have his character "figure himself out" for the finale. Suffice it to say that Molkho's wife loses her beyond-the-grave hold on him. There is something unsatisfying, however, about a transcendence so hurriedly achieved. One feels that a character as memorable as Molkho deserved better.

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Letters

AIDS and the Holocaust

To the Editors:

Jed Perl's criticism always fails to be convincing, but the reason why has never been more apparent than in a noxious comment found in his "A Dissent on Kiefer" (December 1988).

Perl, who believes the Holocaust is being trivialized in both German and American art today, assails the use of photographs of concentration camp victims in the recent mixed-media reliefs of Robert Morris. In a footnote, he discusses Morris's earlier use of a specific World War II reference: the notorious 1974 poster in which the artist showed himself naked to the waist and wearing dark glasses, a spiked steel collar, manacles, and what appears to be a Nazi helmet.

> From s-and-m imagery [Perl writes] to Holocaust imagery is quite a leap—a recapitulation of Nazi history that may also, consciously or unconsciously, mirror one trajectory of contemporary sexual experimentation, whereby some who back then took up s-and-m are now losing their lives to AIDS.

Perl's inference of an equation between the history of the AIDS epidemic and the history of Nazism is certainly repugnant and offensive. More important, however, his supposition of a cause-and-effect relationship between the loosening of sexual repression in the United States and the appearance of the disease is simply false.

Like many bigots who come to the subject of AIDS, Perl is operating under the easy assumption that it constitutes a sexual malady. He expects mere mention of "sexual experimentation" in the vicinity of the disease to bring knowing nods of the head. Of course, a similar reaction is not likely to come from a declaration that some who "back then" took up the missionary position are now losing their lives to AIDS, even though the statement is equally true.

This confusion is dangerous. We have seen, in California as elsewhere, repeated legislative attempts to categorize AIDS along with syphilis and gonorrhea as a sexually transmitted disease (STD). But it is not an STD, any more than the flu or the common cold, which also can be passed during intimate contact ("experimental" or otherwise), is an STD. Rather, AIDS is a group of symptoms that characterize abnormalities in the immune system, which have been generated by a blood-borne virus.

The distinction is critical. The mistaken association serves only to hinder treatment and research—and, not incidentally, to provide a hateful weapon for the continued persecution of (specifically) homosexual men. Indeed, the incorrect attribution of AIDS as a sexual malady—whether directly, in the matter of STDs, or indirectly, in the fallacious commentary of Jed Perl—is merely a transference of the long-discredited claim that homosexuality is itself an illness.

A writer who lacks the intellectual capacity to make critical distinctions should not hold out much hope of ever becoming a persuasive critic. Yet, while much is definitely at stake in the matter of assessing issues raised by the paintings of

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Anselm Kiefer or the mixed-media reliefs of Robert Morris, much is also at stake in the matter of assessing issues raised by a grave and threatening health emergency. One would hope that even a writer of Jed Perl's obviously limited acumen would be able to distinguish which of those is a matter of life and death.

Christopher Knight
Los Angeles, CA

Jed Perl replies:
Since Christopher Knight begins his letter by explaining that my "criticism always fails to be convincing," I doubt whether anything I say will alter his opinion of me.

Knight believes that I have a thinking problem; I'd say that he has a reading problem. I did not make the "inference of an equation between the history of the AIDS epidemic and the history of Nazism." I tried to describe an equation that I saw being made in certain contemporary art. Knight—who is a newspaperman (for *The Los Angeles Herald Examiner*)—ought to understand the difference between opinion and reportage.

Knight says that I expect "the mere mention of 'sexual experimentation' in the vicinity of the disease to bring knowing nods of the head." He is reading things into my text. If Knight thinks that "sexual" or "experimentation" are judgmental words—that's his hang-up. I wouldn't jump to the conclusion that the writer who says "experimentation" is anti-experimentation. Mostly his argument has nothing whatever to do with what I wrote.

Susan Warner's canonization

To the Editors:
In his essay "The Canonization of Susan Warner" (December 1988), I think D. G. Myers made a compelling case against the "canonization" that Jane Tompkins has attempted. I think Myers was greatly mistaken, however, on two other counts.

First, it was unjust of Myers to demolish the weakest chapter in Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* without even mentioning her brilliant achievement in other parts of her book. I rank her analysis of Charles Brockden Brown, for example, with the best work ever done on that important writer. And second, Myers was mistaken in his inference that Tompkins misread Warner's novel because she appears "unable to conceive of religion as anything more than a sham."

Not only does Tompkins's chapter on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* refute that notion; her life also refutes it. As her colleague for four years now, I have come to admire Jane Tompkins as a doer of the Word. As a weekly routine, she entertains Alzheimer's patients by singing hymns for them, she serves meals in our city's United Ministries Soup Kitchen, she solicits money and helping hands for the homeless, and she otherwise makes herself useful to people in need. Although I have never inquired about her degree of orthodoxy, I relate these activities in some sense to the sort of Christian sensibility that she stoutly defends in some sections of *Sensational Designs*.

Although Mr. Myers cannot be blamed for being in ignorance of his subject's personal life, I think your magazine should correct its image of Jane Tompkins by publishing this letter.

Victor Strandberg
Professor of English
Duke University
Durham, NC

D. G. Myers replies:
First, I do not share Professor Strandberg's high opinion of the "other parts" of Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*. But this is really beside the point. The occasion of my essay was a scrutiny of Tompkins's case on behalf of Susan Warner, a figure whose increasing importance in the study of American literature can be credited to Tompkins. It seemed not "unjust" to examine Tompkins's argument on its merits and to ignore that which was irrelevant, "brilliant" though it may be.

At the same time, however, my concern is not with the "image of Jane Tompkins." It is with Tompkins's criticism and the logic of her thought. Professor Strandberg takes the evidence of Tompkins's "Christian sensibility" at face value and so would be obliged, by a logic of respect, to believe that the faith of a nineteenth-century Christian was on the evidence equally whole-hearted and sincere. I accept the sincerity

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of Susan Warner's faith, and so I am obliged to accept Jane Tompkins's.

But Tompkins operates under no such obligation. For her, Christianity in the nineteenth century was entirely a matter of power. (Her essay on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does little to refute this notion.) In her analysis, religion is either a form of "empowerment"—a Christian woman eludes the worldly authority of men by "merg[ing] her own authority with [God's]"—or it is false: a woman may believe she has attained salvation, but all she has really done is "to submit to the [male] authorities society has placed over [her]," including the male God. What both Tompkins and Professor Strandberg fail to perceive is that the logic of such a method cuts both ways. Either Tompkins's own religious outlook is open to a similar interpretation, or her criticism of the social function of religion is essentially unserious.

"Forbidden Territory"

To the Editors:
Being a bit behind in my reading, I have only now read Lauren Weiner's review of our publication of Juan Goytisolo's *Forbidden Territory* in your December 1988 issue.

I can only wish that Miss Weiner had followed what I believe is the customary practice in proper reviewing, that is to check *advance uncorrected proofs*, submitted early to reviewers for their convenience, against the finished bound book. Had such a simple check taken place she would have discovered that "Peter Bush's egregious mistranslation of the word 'Catalan' to read 'Spanish' in places" was properly caught in our proofing process and was corrected prior to our printing. This error does not appear in any bound copies of our edition.

Jack Shoemaker
Editor-in-Chief
North Point Press
Berkeley, CA

Lauren Weiner replies:
Mr. Shoemaker is right; I should have checked the proofs against the final version of the book. Regrettably, the final book was not available when the review went to press. But now I have my finished copy of *Forbidden Territory* and as I turn to pages 27 and 28 I see that on page 27 the error that I alluded to has been caught, but page 28 still has Goytisolo saying that he, his brothers, and other writers in their circle felt like "Spaniards in Madrid and Castilians in Barcelona," when the proper translation is "Catalans in Madrid and Castilians in Barcelona." Not a mistake one would expect from a professional translator. And it isn't an inconsequential one, either, for it confusingly deprives Goytisolo, who felt "enriched by this mutual rejection," of the misfit role so central to his personality and work.

The North Point editors have reduced Peter Bush's embarrassment by fifty percent. For the other fifty percent not much can be done, but North Point may want to consider sending erratum slips to the sellers of *Forbidden Territory*.

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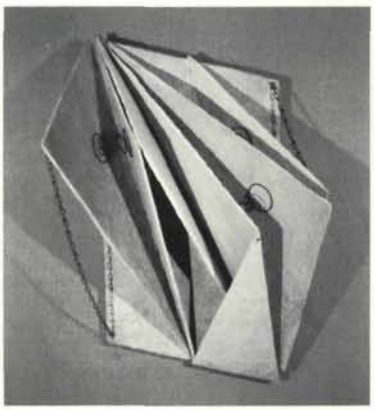

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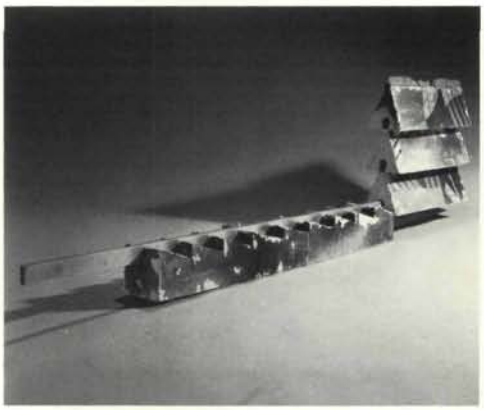

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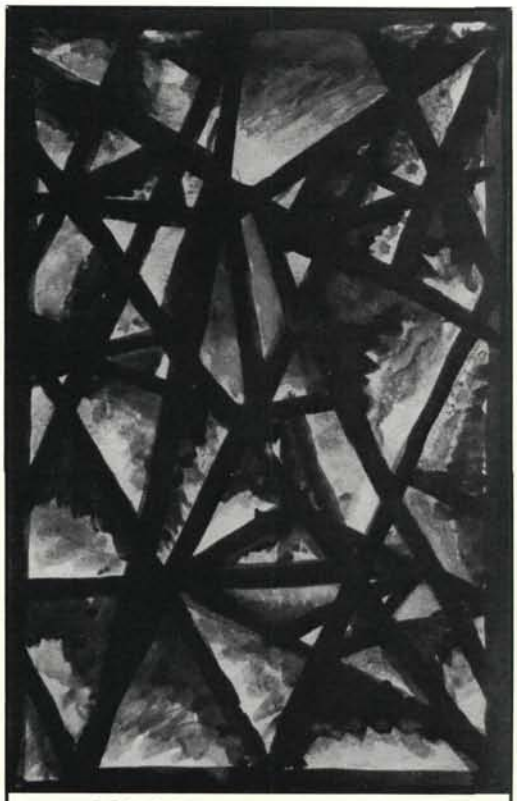

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